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CLOOTIE WELLS AND WATER-KELPIES:

AN ETHNOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE FRESH WATER TRADITIONS OF SACRED WELLS AND SUPERNATURAL HORSES IN SCOTLAND

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines different aspects of tradition relating to fresh water in Scotland. They include: the use of water from wells and springs for healing and divination purposes; the beliefs around the liminal quality of water, often considered as boundary, and around its magical association with the horse; and finally folktales featuring the water-horse, or kelpie, a supernatural creature which was said to inhabit lochs and rivers. In dealing with topics so different one from the other, within the larger field of Scottish customs and beliefs, it proved necessary to use a variety of sources and methods. Comparative study was often particularly illuminating.

After presenting the history of visits to sacred wells, I deal with two main categories of customs associated with these pilgrimages, namely healing rituals and divination practices. While the former leads to the analysis of the different stages and implications of the ritual, the latter looks into the issues that were left to supernatural powers to decide upon, and examines how the questions asked of the oracle evolved with time. Consideration of these powers then leads on to further inquiry into the liminal function of fresh water in general, and its links with boundaries both spatial and temporal. That the horse, another element that is ascribed definite liminal qualities, was associated with water is therefore not fortuitous. If water provides an entry to an Other World, the horse can then take one through into this other land. Indeed, this is what is found in the corpus of tales centred on the figure of the water-horse. As some of the tale-types are met in other geographical areas – Ireland and Scandinavia mainly – a discussion of these will provide a general background to the tales, which will result in a proposal for a revised tale-index. Two shared types – the work-horse and the abductor of children – will then be examined in the Scottish context. One type, however, – the seducer – seems to be unique to Scotland, and it will be dealt with last.

The aim of this work is twofold: first, to provide an ethnological piece of research from a diachronic perspective on a subject outwith the usual themes generally chosen for studies of this nature; second, to present together, in their Scottish context, folktales that have been hitherto broken up and read in the light of their relationships to their foreign counterparts.

Although recent academic studies on healing wells exist for Ireland and France, the Scottish material has never previously been treated in such a study. A number of sources available were secondary accounts, dating back mainly to the turn of the twentieth century, and part of my research involved finding the original documents used – sometimes misused – in order to present them in their original context. Similarly, part of the work on the kelpie stories involved gathering together tales kept in the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh that had never been collected into a single corpus. I hope in this thesis to provide a sound basis for further researches on these types of Scottish customs and beliefs. (95475 words)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The study of traditions related to the symbolic use of fresh water in Scotland is one that covers several fields and disciplines, ranging from ethnology and anthropology to history; from oral narratives and cosmology to comparative mythology. The principal topics explored in this work vary accordingly in nature and purpose. Thus, a historical presentation of the visits to sacred wells in Scotland will be followed by a structural analysis of the healing ritual that took place at these wells, based on first-hand accounts (Section One of the thesis). The focus will then shift to cosmological considerations pertaining to the question of centre and boundaries, both in terms of space and time. There we will look at the associations of water with these spatio-temporal thresholds. A study of certain customs performed at designated times of the year – from Hallowe'en to May Day; and from harvest time to the New Year period – will introduce ideas such as the concept of limited good (Foster 1965), or the notion of man's debt to Nature (Muller 1996-1997), which will be used to give a socio-economic frame for the practices under discussion (Section Two). Finally, the presentation of legends featuring the supernatural creature that is the waterhorse will give us the occasion to see how certain beliefs concerning the supernatural and the Otherworld were used in the domain of oral narratives as a way to perpetuate social institutions like marriage, as well as convey a very strong sense of 'the norm', be it moral, religious or cultural (Section Three). As one can see, all these different topics required use to be made of a wide range of source materials, and entailed a variety of approaches. In all cases, I have found the comparative approach fruitful, and all the more so since some of the subjects I treat have not been discussed elsewhere.

As a whole, this study is mostly preoccupied with the transmission and evolution of customs and beliefs that are conventionally associated with 'popular culture'. However, this concept, or category, is a problematic one, and the rich debate concerning what exactly can be qualified as popular culture is likely to continue as long as the different disciplines involved in the discussion – history, ethnology, anthropology, sociology – continue to provide different definitions of the terms, taken jointly or separately (see Christiansen 1984). In the last analysis, there does not seem to exist a convincing, encompassing definition of 'popular culture'. In our case, the focus should probably be the 'popular' side of culture, in so far as the people and their beliefs and practices are the *raison d'être* of the following pages.

The thesis is organised in three sections that each groups the chapters according to their general orientation. Thus, in Section One, which groups together Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I shall set out to provide the historical background against which pilgrimages to wells, according to the expression employed in various Kirk records and Acts of the Parliament of Scotland, took place and evolved, followed by a study of the rituals that took place during these visits. As we will see, despite the successive efforts of the Medieval Church and Reformed Kirk, visitors have continued to frequent sacred wells.

The decision to present each subject – the historical background and the rituals performed at wells – separately and in a diachronic manner, which I deemed preferable to treating both topics together in a more linear way, will have inevitably led to some repetitions. However, it seemed to me that certain issues, such as the attitude of the Church towards what it condemned as superstitious behaviour, deserved to be treated as fully as possible, from different perspectives. Thus, although both chapters in the section follow the same chronological pattern, the political and cultural aspects of the concept of superstition are developed in Chapter 2, while in Chapter 3, I focus more on the contents of these so-called superstitions. This holistic approach will, I hope, help to further our understanding of the ritual, and beyond the ritual itself, of the mental frame in which it occurred.

Treating the ritual in itself, as opposed to presenting its applications to nominal cases of disease, has allowed me to show its affinities to sacrificial practices, thus placing it in a wider theoretical frame than would have been possible otherwise. In that respect, the use of comparative studies has been invaluable. It has, in all events allowed me to propose that healing rites performed at Scottish wells were symptomatic of a certain conception of the world, which placed man and the Otherworld – deities, gods, the supernatural: the names do not really matter – in a relationship built on relatively balanced exchanges. This view assumes that man could control, of course only to a certain extent, what happened to him, in a world otherwise governed by Nature, via the performance of, mainly sacrificial, rituals.

The modalities and structure of these exchanges are examined in Section Two of the thesis. The passages to the Otherworld referred to in the title of the section concern both the temporal and the spatial dimensions – keeping in mind the central theme of this work, the traditions associated with fresh water, mainly in Scotland. Hence we will be discussing why the use of water seems so relevant in customs related to the quarter days of Beltane and Samhain (Chapter 4) and in clusters of customs organised around Michaelmas and Lammas on the one hand, and Christmas and the Twelve Days period on the other (Chapter 5).

The question of temporal centres and boundaries dealt with in Chapter 4 is a complicated issue, for time is a fairly abstract concept, not easily separated from that of space. The need to try to define the function of time in such a perspective was imposed by the nature of the practices conducted on these two dates. I had not realised, when I started the study of divinatory and magic practices associated with water, that they were so intimately linked to these two concepts of centre and boundaries, not only in spatial terms, but also in their relation to temporal prescriptions. Using a structural analysis partly based on Arnold Van Gennep's classification of the ubiquitous *rites de passage* (1908), and partly stemming from Emily Lyle's conclusions on the implications yielded by considering temporal centre and boundaries separately from spatial ones (1991) I propose, however tentatively, that the time boundaries represented by Hallowe'en and May Day could be seen as constituting a reversed, rather than simply opposite, image of one another. I also argue that the reversed structure of both festivals has strong implications on the part of the year they define. In the part dedicated to occasional practices, mainly divinatory, we can see how their contextualisation can help to understand underlying and unexpressed conceptions about cosmology. The comparison of hundred-years-old material with modern data is, in that respect, particularly illuminating.

The following chapter, entitled 'Ritual horse races and the renewal of the year' touches upon a new area of research – at least in the Scottish domain and as far as I know – looking at certain customs performed both at Michaelmas and around Christmas, not as unrelated occurrences, but as a pair. The principal feature of the customs under consideration consisted of ritual horse races and cavalcades. Although on both occasions the – magically assured – good health of the horses appeared as the most obvious reason to hold the race or cavalcade, peripheral activities which differed for harvest and winter celebrations also took place, hinting at a deeper meaning of the custom. Working with comparative material once again proved immensely fruitful. Ultimately, this encompassing approach could lead to the reinterpretation of some of the related ethnographic data. One remarkable feature of the ritual races was their strong association with water, which, on these special occasions, was used on the horses for its apotropaic virtues. The races, however, only form a small, if important, part of the very complex set of customs involved, another emerging theme being the association of the horse with the Otherworld.

This association will be explored in Section Three, through the presentation and analysis of some folk narratives about the waterhorse, or *each uisge*. As will be shown in Chapter 6, there are so many different types of legends in which the waterhorse figures that a selection had to be operated with respect to the detailed

treatment of some of them. The choice as to which types were going to be developed was based directly on the contents of the stories. Thus I decided to present an analysis of those types which were typical waterhorse narratives – as opposed to stories that can feature the waterhorse as well as other types of supernatural beings.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to classification issues, as problems arose when the amount of data I was able to gather outgrew the frame that Alan Bruford and Donald Archie MacDonald had devised in the 1960s and 1970s. The increase in the number of items meant that new motifs appeared, or at least new patterns emerged, affecting the coherence of the waterhorse narrative types which had been accepted until then. The classification system I propose should be considered the starting point for a more far-reaching task, namely the re-organisation of the Scottish legends catalogue – my attempt constitutes by no means the definitive solution. My aim, in gathering together written sources for what is, essentially, oral narrative material, was to provide an area of Scottish Studies that has been lacking with useable data, particularly in terms of international comparative studies.

Waterhorses are not exclusive to Scotland, and we will compare in Chapter 7 the Scottish material to the Irish and Scandinavian data, in the light of the amendments proposed in terms of classification. The Irish material has been presented and analysed in several articles by Bo Almqvist (1990a; 1991a; 1991b; 1991c) and Annaba Kilfeather (1988) and it was extremely interesting to draw out the similarities between Ireland and Scotland. Most rewarding, however, was the 'discovery' that there were more distinctive differences than similarities between the two. This proved equally true when the comparison shifted to the Scandinavian area.

Chapter 8 will be dealing with a set of narrative types, all sharing the waterhorse taking the shape of a young man – an ability of the creature that seems to be exclusive to Scotland. These legends, which all start with the waterhorse attempting to seduce a woman, will be treated according to their typology, allowing us to see to what extent and in what domains the role of legends as essentially social lessons can be applied.

Lastly, I draw the thesis to an end in Chapter 9, which outlines the conclusions reached in the different chapters, while proposing various other possibilities of further research.

With such a broad scope, both in terms of the long period of time covered and in terms of the variety of practices involved, it is inevitable that some areas did not perhaps receive as full a treatment as they would have deserved. However, I have tried, throughout the study, to convey the importance that the practices had, not only with a view to increasing our knowledge and understanding of the societies under

consideration – although it is, of course a very natural aspiration – but also, and above all, the place that these customs occupied in the life of those who practised them. In a sense, some of the preoccupations of the people in the sixteenth century were not so dissimilar from ours, but the frame in which these concerns grew and were quelled is very different from our own environment, making the interpretation of the data sometimes hazardous. Bearing this in mind, I hope nonetheless to have contributed to bring into light, as far as the subject of this thesis is concerned, some of the beliefs, fears, and hopes that formed, and form, a part of people's lives.

SECTION ONE

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SCOTTISH CLOOTIE WELLS

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF VISITS AND VISITORS TO HOLY WELLS

Introduction

This chapter presents the historical context of visits to wells, and their continuous existence in adverse religious circumstances. Archaeological finds, such as inscriptions and sculpted figures, prove that a form of devotion took place at springs and wells, among other natural settings, from the Iron Age onwards. In Scotland, there has been speculation as to the significance of some Bronze Age finds recovered in watery areas such as peat bogs. At any rate, they would seem to imply a religious system based on, or orientated toward, nature. In fact, we find that for many pre-Roman cultures, the religion was one of the *locus*, in which worship was essentially tied to a specific place. The transition from pre-Christian religions to Christianity was an arduous process and the writings of the early missionaries show how difficult the task of conversion was. Recurring references, in sermons, letters, and religious treatises, to ritual activities carried out at wells and springs only illustrate how deeply embedded such practices were among the people. The Church began the process of slowly transforming and re-directing indigenous cults associated with water toward saints, thereby providing an acceptable Christian alternative to the pre-Christian practices. Underneath the 'make-over', however, customs retained a certain pre-Christian character, which shows through Reformation records. The shift brought about by the Reformed Church turned out to be more radical than the one early Christians had initiated. For the Protestants, the task was to eradicate remnants of both Catholic and pagan faiths alike. However, this process did not go as smoothly as the authorities would have wished and, despite the strong alliance between State and Church, records at our disposal show how rife ancient practices still were as late as the eighteenth century. Only then did the visits to holy/healing wells recede, partly because they stopped being so vigorously fought against,[1] and partly because of a new form of rationalism that ascribed scientific – as opposed to supernatural – medicinal powers to water. However, though such practices diminished, they did not altogether disappear. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers revelled in describing primitive customs and beliefs among the peasantry, the better to

[1] This is not as paradoxical as it seems; the lack of interest displayed by ecclesiastical and secular authorities certainly helped push old customs into oblivion.

emphasise the gap they saw between an urban, progress-orientated environment, and the backward-looking rusticity of the countryside. More recently, the situation has evolved again both with respect to the practices and to what is written about them. Two different perspectives can be distinguished at the present time. The first one draws on a strong political and ideological background, whereby 'clootie wells' are being reclaimed as a symbol of authenticity and 'Scottishness' in the eyes of a general, nationalist, public.[2] The second one, by contrast, is confined to the private sphere, in which people see themselves as the quiet bearers of a very ancient tradition.[3]

Exactly how ancient, is what I am going to try to investigate now.

Part 1 – The importance of the locus *and the process of Christianisation*

Most publications that have come to my attention, dealing with visiting wells and springs, introduce their topic with a warning that its origins are lost in time, that it has always existed, that 'In it are found echoes of the beliefs and ways of thought and life before written history, relics of pre-Christian beliefs' (Jones 1992: 11). And indeed, the more one works on the subject, the more convinced one becomes that it is so, that the worship of, or at, wells, fought against since the beginning of Christian times, appeals to a very deep layer of human beliefs. I want to quote Francis Jones again, for he has very skilfully defined what is at stake in his book, *The Holy Wells of Wales*:

> The importance of the well-cult lies not only in its great antiquity, but in its survival to modern days. Rooted in paganism, 'converted' to Christian usage, condemned by Protestantism, 'explained' by folklorists, rationalised by modern education, the cult has survived and still wields an influence over the human mind. (1992: 11)

This idea of the perenniality of an 'interest', to say the least, in wells is going to lead us throughout this study. Outside Scotland, studies on the current frequenting of healing wells provide valuable and verifiable contemporary counterparts to archaeological material, which by its nature is more open to speculation. Data survive that point to an early system of beliefs focused on, or at least using, water. In an article entitled 'The Celtic Goddess as Healer', Miranda Green gives several instances of 'spring-goddesses' and water-spirits of which archaeological evidence exists throughout England and continental Europe. One instance is the goddess

[2] This is the case in particular for St Mary's Well in Culloden Woods, near Inverness.
[3] I found this attitude among the visitors at Craiguck's Well, on the Black Isle.

Sequana, personification of the Seine, who was particularly worshipped at the river's source, the *Fontes Sequanae*. As Green explains, 'here, in the valley of the Châtillon Plateau, a spring of fresh, pure water wells up from the ground and was the focus of religious devotion from the later first century BC' (Green 1996: 28). Other inscriptions and dedications honouring the Celtic triple goddess of fertility, both in Latin and Gaulish, have been found in Glanum, near Arles, 'associated with a native healing spring' (Klingshirn 1994: 49).[4]

There is always a risk, when working with prehistoric material, of misinterpretation, especially in the sphere of beliefs. Writing about Iron Age Celts, Green warns: 'Because all the evidence is indirect and non-explicit and since belief-systems belong to the realm of thought, it is necessary to exercise extreme caution in making inferences about ancient perceptions of the supernatural' (1997: 2). The same caution and rigour are, *a fortiori*, required for earlier times such as the Bronze Age period. However, archaeological finds dating from this period in the North-East of Scotland seem to substantiate the association of a very ancient form of cult with certain landscape features, particularly in relation to water. Trevor Cowie, in a book intended to supplement an exhibition presenting early Scottish metalwork, describes many sites and finds that were discovered near watery areas. Amongst them, for instance, a hoard composed of flat axes, bar armlets, beads, bronze earrings, etc. (c. 2200 – 1500 BC) was dug up on a site near the west end of Loch Migdale (Bonar Bridge, Sutherland), and in the vicinity of a small ceremonial enclosure, or 'mini-henge' (Cowie 1988: 19). In addition, 'the largest assemblage of flat axes and daggers yet found in Scotland' comes from the southern end of the Great Glen, near Inverlochy; it was unearthed from 'pits marked by natural boulders at one end of a prominent elongated fluvio-glacial mound overlooking the confluences of the Rivers Lochy and Lundy' (p. 23). It is interesting to note, at this point, that thousands of years after these axes and daggers were deposited, some recent material describes how water from a confluence was judged more powerful than 'normal' water to use in magical practices.[5] Apart from the apparent careful choice of a location, the very nature of some finds leaves very little doubt as to their ritual destination.[6] Thus at The Beith, Ayrshire, a late Bronze Age find (from 900 BC), recovered in a peat

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[4] The presence of Celts in Arles is attested from the sixth century BC (see Klingshirn 1994: 34).

[5] This will be dealt with further in Chapter 4, in the discussion on boundaries.

[6] 'While some of the finds could reflect the erosion of riverside settlements, or accidents, the very high quality of the metal work argues against casual losses and suggests that these discoveries reflect deliberate deposition in the course of religious or funerary ceremonies' (Cowie 1988: 27-29). For further reading on the place of landscape in archaeological studies, see Peter J. Ucko and Robert Layton (eds) 1999.

moss, consisted of up to six shields that had been placed to form a circle, manifestly pointing towards a ritual explanation.[7]

This combination of striking features of the landscape and the specific nature of what was committed to the water indicates, as Green suggests for Iron Age Celts, the importance that nature, or a certain conception of nature, played in these small early communities: 'The evidence at our disposal points to a religious system based upon the recognition of the numinous in all aspects of the natural world, an animistic perception in which each tree, lake, mountain and spring contained a spiritual presence' (1997: 2). It should not therefore come as a surprise that a combination of several of these elements would have been felt to accentuate the sacredness of the place, and thus its power:

> Celtic and Germanic religions also relied heavily on groves, caves, mountains and other numinous sites. Mountain peaks had sacred resonances. Fountains were major sites for worship – and for miracles. Forests were awesome. When these occurred together, their power was enhanced. (Howe 1997: 66)

The attention given to the sites of sanctuaries pertains to the nature of the cults performed at such sacred places, and those in turn reflect the social structure in which they arose. In a relatively self-contained community, internally ruled – as opposed to one governed by an outside, formal, source of authority as will become the case during the Roman Empire – the religious system would be closely connected to the people within their immediate surroundings:

> Deeply rooted in the local and the communal realities of life, [the traditional religions of antiquity] reflected the diversity of local communities. Unlike universal, 'organized' cults, such as Mithraism, Judaism, or Christianity, community religions were attached to specific places and specific groups. ... People belonged to them by virtue of belonging to a local kinship group and a local community, not by virtue of individual choice. Their structure reflected the local social order: their gods were local gods, their sanctuaries were local sanctuaries, and their priests were local priests. Thus was 'paganism' truly a religion of place. (Klingshirn 1994: 46-47)

This factor, I think, played an important part in the relative failure of the early medieval Church in eradicating local religious practices. By proselytising and generally focusing on the people, extracting and separating them from their *locus*,

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[7] See John M. Coles 1959-1960: 39. Two other finds of shields in watery areas have been analysed in the same way. P. J. Ashmore, writing on a find in Duddingston Loch, near Edinburgh, consisting of metal weapons, concluded prudently: 'It seems that here, as elsewhere in Britain and Ireland, there was a cult which involved the throwing of metal offerings into lakes and rivers.' (1996: 116)

Christian authorities missed out on a very important part of the belief system they wanted to replace. As we shall now see, the only way to convert populations was to convert their sacred places – as Gregory the Great set out to do at the very start of the seventh century.

In order to understand how the conversion of sacred places came about, it is necessary to explore the attitudes of the Church and its politics towards the practices that included worship of, or at, wells.[8] The results achieved by the ecclesiastical authorities seem retrospectively very ambiguous, I believe for two main reasons. The first is that two very different alternatives were followed, one of which consisted of the annihilation of the practices, the other of their assimilation. The second reason for the confusing results mentioned stems from the triumph of the tactics of assimilation which essentially blurred the difference between what was Christian and what was not.[9]

The destructive option seems to have been tried first, advocated, for example, in virulent writings by Caesarius of Arles (d. 543) or Martin of Braga (d. 580). But their main theme – how to prevent converts from behaving like the pagans they once were – recurs so often that we cannot but conclude that their message was lost on the recipients. The writings of Caesarius of Arles, bishop of Arles and a partisan of radical change, illustrate just these circumstances.[10] Although he preached and wrote his sermons and diffused them to be read, and although he changed Church canons so as to allow priests to preach as well (at least in his province), his tireless endeavours do not appear to have been very successful. His influence was nevertheless very strong, and it can be found in various writings produced at later dates.[11] One such example of the firm denunciation of non-Christian practices is the eighth-century *Homelia de Sacrilegiis*, that Valerie Flint recognises as 'a striking testimony not only to the strength and obduracy of outlawed magical practices, but also and more interestingly, to the evident ineffectiveness of condemnation *tout simple*' (1994: 43).[12] Over fifty years after Caesarius's death, Pope Gregory the Great showed the same initial determination about the line to follow. This appears for instance in his correspondence with Augustine of Canterbury who had travelled to what is now

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[8] For an extensive discussion of the general politics of incorporation and prohibition of pre-Christian customs and beliefs by the Church, and their role in the transformation of those, see Flint 1994.

[9] This form of syncretism will supply thinkers of the Reform such as Luther and Calvin with an argument against Catholicism, which places it and paganism on the same level (see below 'Reformation').

[10] See also Klingshirn 1994: 238; and Hillgarth (ed.) 1986: 53-64 for Martin of Braga.

[11] See Flint 1994: 42-43.

[12] For a full discussion on Caesarius's strategies and sermons, see Klingshirn 1994: ch. 8.

England to convert local populations. One of these letters was sent to King Ethelbert of Kent (560-616) who, having been converted to Christianity by Augustine, allowed the latter to proselytise; however, the king refused to oblige his people to adopt his new faith. When this was reported to Gregory, the Pope sent a letter to Ethelbert in June 601, in which he pressed the king to:

> hasten to extend the Christian faith among the people who are subject to you. Increase your righteous zeal for their conversion; suppress the worship of idols; overthrow their buildings and shrines; strengthen the morals of your subjects by outstanding purity of life, by exhorting them, terrifying, enticing, and correcting them, and by showing them an example of good works.[13]

However, attacks against the *loci* of pagan practices appear to have been a tactical error, and Yves Desmet notes on the particular case of wells that 'the prohibition, by the Church, of the use of therapeutic cults at wells was strategically a mistake and the eradication of such practices was doomed to fail' (1998: 14; my translation).[14] The Church probably should not have underestimated the fact that non-Christian beliefs, especially in the cases of medicine and divination, were deeply rooted and that it was not 'a case of faint and lingering traces and last gasps, but of a whole alternative world of intercession' (Flint 1994: 69). This seems to have been recognised by Pope Gregory the Great, and, on 18 July 601, he sent another letter through Mellitus to Augustine in which we are able to see the change in the course of action to be taken by missionaries in England. The elimination of the non-Christian practices by the destruction of the temples and shrines pure and simple was abandoned and replaced by a smoother, and it was believed more efficient, way to win people to the Christian faith, and, just as importantly, to limit the number of apostasies. The letter reads:

> When Almighty God has brought you to our most reverend brother Bishop Augustine, tell him what I have decided after long deliberation about the English people, namely that the idol temples of that race should by no means be destroyed, but only the idols in them. Take holy water and sprinkle it in these shrines, build altars and place relics in them. For if the shrines are well built, it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God. When these people see that their shrines are not destroyed they will be able to banish error from their hearts and be more ready to come to the places they are familiar with, but now recognizing and worshipping the true God. And because they are in the habit of slaughtering much cattle as sacrifices to devils, some solemnity

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[13] Colgrave and Mynors (eds) 1969: 112-113; see Duggan (1997: 56) for the historical context.

[14] 'L'interdiction, par l'Eglise, du recours aux cultes thérapeutiques auprès des fontaines était une erreur de statégie et l'éradication de telles pratiques était vouée à l'échec.'

> ought to be given them in exchange for this. So on the day of the dedication or the festivals of the holy martyrs, whose relics are deposited there, let them make themselves huts from the branches of trees around the churches which have been converted out of shrines, and let them celebrate the solemnity with religious feasts. Do not let them sacrifice animals to the devil, but let them slaughter animals for their own food to the praise of God, and let them give thanks to the Giver of all things for His bountiful provision. Thus while some outward rejoicings are preserved, they will be able more easily to share in inward rejoicings. It is doubtless impossible to cut out everything at once from their stubborn minds: just as the man who is attempting to climb to the highest place, rises by steps and degrees and not by leaps.[15]

This letter is extremely rich in implications for the development of Christianity in the British Isles, since it plays on the similarities between the two religions, the Old and the New, the better to bring the former to oblivion, buried under the new forms of another system of values. Indeed it has been argued that the fact that the ancient cults were deity-based facilitated the assimilation of the old practices to the Christian system; the saints soon replaced officially, if not popularly, the former deities.[16]

But the replacement of 'devils', as Gregory called them, with Christian martyrs in both the lives and the landscapes of local populations represented a course of action at the same time subtle and very ambiguous – ambiguous because one is inclined to feel that the distinction between their gods and the saints must have seemed very tenuous to the populations; subtle because underneath the small material changes, like the replacement of the 'idols' with 'relics', a much more important mechanism was at work, involving the relationship between man and his natural environment. As Gregory had foreseen, the path leading to the conversion of pagan peoples first lay with the conversion of their cult centres.[17] This conversion which relied on the introduction of saints was called a process of '*hominisation*' of nature by Alphonse Dupront (1973: 191). This process was further discussed by Peter Brown in his book on the cult of the saints, and for him this 'hominisation' meant that 'the natural world [was] made passive by being shorn of the power of the gods. ... [T]he most marked feature of the rise of the Christian church in Western Europe was the imposition of human administrative structures ... at the expense of traditions that had seemed to belong to the structure of the landscape itself.' (1981: 124-5) The 'devils', again in Gregory's terms, represented this tradition of spirits linked with nature. The existence of devils or daimones (cf. Plato's *Timaeus* 40-42) was not, by definition,

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[15] Colgrave and Mynors (eds) 1969: 106-109.
[16] See Desmet 1998: 11; Hamilton 1986: 102.
[17] On the impact of Christianity on landscape, see the article by John Howe (1997: 63).

supported by a visual medium, but was nonetheless widely and deeply believed in: 'many a grove, or spring, or tree, had ... its lower daimon temporarily assigned to that particular place on the earth. Such beliefs responded to movements of the human spirit not easily quelled and with danger repressed.' (Flint 1994: 103) The alternative to the repression of the human inclination to believe in the preternatural powers of nature was to provide another medium for people's beliefs; thus the Christian Church introduced intercessors between man and deity. The direct contact between man and his 'natural' gods and goddesses was re-orientated towards the more 'human' figures of the saints. Healing wells, such as the numerous wells 'of the eye', named after the body part they cured, were then translated into a Christian phraseology, and dedicated for instance to Christ or the Virgin Mary (among others).[18]

A corollary of dealing directly with the old places of cult was that populations living away from ecclesiastical centres could thus be reached, who would otherwise have stayed untouched, lying at the periphery beyond the influence of the Church. As Alain Dierkens summarises:

> Sometimes conscious and voluntary, sometimes dictated by the passive resistance of the populations, this appropriation of pre-Christian (rather than pagan) practices or customs allowed the Church to establish itself in the rural environment among people whom the 'clerical' culture could not touch or convince using theoretical and doctrinal arguments. (1984: 25; my translation)[19]

Deprived of the help that could have been given by the 'theoretical and doctrinal arguments', rural clerics still needed to affirm the supremacy of their system of beliefs over the old one. Miracles filled that role since their use of the supernatural did not, in essence, differ from other 'magic' occurrences.[20] In the case of wells, two types of miracles, equally powerful, could be called upon. The first one involved the conversion of a well already considered sacred; while the second entailed the 'creation' of a 'new' one.

An example of the first type is given by Adomnán in his *Life of Columba*, where he relates how the saint transformed a well that was said to be plagued by demons:

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[18] In France, some names such as St Genou (St Knee), echo the healing function of the well and beliefs in which nature sometimes overpowers saints (see Caulier 1990).

[19] 'Tantôt consciente et volontaire, tantôt imposée par la résistance passive des populations, cette récupération de pratiques ou d'habitudes pré-chrétiennes (plutôt que païennes) permit à l'Eglise de s'implanter en milieu rural, auprès d'habitants que la culture "cléricale" ne pouvait toucher ou convaincre par des arguments théoriques et doctrinaux'.

[20] For a further discussion on 'magic' and 'religion', see Part 1 of the next chapter, 'Superstition, medicine, magic and religion'.

> [F]irst raising his holy hand in the name of Christ, [he] washed his hands and feet; and after that those that accompanied him, drank of the same water, which he had blessed. And from that day, the demons withdrew from that well, and not only was it not permitted to harm any one, but after the saint's blessing, and washing in it, many infirmities among the people were in fact cured by the same well [which had previously left people] leprous, or half-blind, or even crippled, or suffering from some other infirmity. (Anderson, A. and M. [eds] 1991: 109-111)[21]

It should be noted here that 'sacred' does not necessarily mean 'beneficent'. The sacred character of a place, for instance, secludes this place, demarcates it from its environment because of its particular qualities or properties – whether empirically perceptible (e.g. landscape features), or intellectually given (e.g. aetiological legend). As Mircea Eliade defines it: 'A thing becomes sacred in so far as it embodies (that is, reveals) something other than itself. Here we need not be concerned with whether that something other comes from its unusual shape, its efficacy or simply its "power".' (1979 [1958]: 13) It is then not surprising that such a well as the one described in the quotation above, which was believed to harm people, should have been considered sacred. Incidentally, this passage provides an illustration of the belief in the existence of 'demons' that dwelt in nature, and of their replacement by Christian saints.

As to the second type of miracles, they were in fact not so much 'creations' of 'new' wells as the integration of existing wells into a Christian tradition of martyrdom, thereby granting them sacredness. Their aetiological legend could, for instance, draw on the symbolism of the head,[22] as in the following example from Wales, which illustrates how the appearance of a new spring was said to have coincided with the beheading of a saintly figure: 'St Llud was beheaded by a pursuer on Slwch Hill (Breck.) and "her head rowling a little down the hill, a Cleare Spring of Water Issued out of the Rock where it rested".'[23] More often than not, the wells associated with the death of a saint, or with a violent death more generally, were believed to have special healing virtues.[24]

The policy of replacing pre-Christian customs with Christian ones, with a view to eradicating the former, did not prove entirely successful, however, since an important number of practices thus meant to be suppressed were still a preoccupation for the

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[21] Columba's beneficial actions on watery places plagued by evil spirits and blood-thirsty creatures had also a very clear political flavour to them, aiming to assert the superiority of Christians over pagans (see Macille Dhuibh 1999).

[22] See for instance Ross 1962.

[23] Jones 1992: 38, quoting British Library Harl. MS 4181, f. 76a.

[24] See Jones (1992: 37), and Flint (1994: 267, n. 46) for further examples and references.

Church well over a century after Gregory's second letter. This is shown for instance in the *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, a very interesting document written, in all likelihood, c. 743-744, in Etinnes (Germany).[25] It consists of a list of thirty superstitious practices and beliefs, among which figures the prohibition concerning the 'wells of sacrifices'.[26] So although on the surface it may appear that the Church offered a 'notorious readiness ... to assimilate elements of the old paganism into their own religious practice, rather than pose too direct a conflict of loyalties in the minds of the new converts' (Thomas 1973: 54), the fact that it had fought those customs that it deemed pagan should not be overlooked. An influential figure such as Caesarius seems to have been only too aware of the dangers of the similarities between some forms of pre-Christian and Christian use of the supernatural (see Klingshirn 1994: 166-167) – similarities that the Reformation was determined to eradicate entirely.

Part 2 – The impact of the Reformation

Although the medieval Church and the new Kirk had the same objective – to convert people to their respective faiths – the two operated in opposite ways. The medieval Christians tried to encompass pre-Christian customs; whereas the Reformers were set on leaving out anything – and anyone – that did not conform to the new demands.

The historian Jean Delumeau wrote that the situation in Scotland, immediately prior to the Reformation was similar to that in most of the other Western nations, in that 'A deep, if anarchic, piety and a Christian humanism of a high quality existed alongside innumerable abuses. ... The faithful were often being abandoned by [the Church]. On the eve of the Reformation, 262 parishes had a priest, but over 600 were left to substitutes, often little educated. That above all was serious.'[27] (1968: 140; my translation) The Reformed Church was not only determined that each parish should have its own minister, elected by the parishioners, as opposed to a stranger

[25] Cf. the masterly demonstration by Alain Dierkens (1984).

[26] The original reads: '*De fontibus sacrificiorum*' (Dierkens 1984: 20), and it is usually translated as 'About fountains of sacrifices' (see for instance McNeill and Gamer [eds] 1990: 420). I prefer to use the word 'wells', as it does not imply the existence of a structure in the same way that 'fountains' does.

[27] 'Une piété profonde, mais anarchique, et un humanisme chrétien de grande qualité côtoyaient d'innombrables abus. ... Les fidèles étaient souvent abandonnés par [l'Eglise]. A la veille de la Réforme, 262 paroisses possédaient un curé, mais plus de 600 étaient laissées à des remplaçants, souvent peu instruits. Cela surtout était grave.'

nominated by faraway ecclesiastical authorities, but also that the elected man should be educated.[28]

The religious situation inherited by the Reformers was one of a fairly syncretic form of Christianity that the new ecclesiastical authorities were resolved to see disappear.[29] It is thanks to their vehemence and determination that we are able, today, 'to realise how firmly entrenched in the life of the people were these semi-Christianised remnants of heathen rituals' (Mill 1927: 10). At the basis of their separation from the Catholic establishment was the strong belief that the latter's faith was misplaced, resulting in a form of idolatry:

> Thus idolatry is present everywhere in the world Luther condemns and idols are innumerable. Among these, the Reformer counts the Pope, the bishops and the ecclesiastics of the Papist Church. They have usurped power that belongs to God alone, they direct toward themselves veneration diverted from its true object.[30] (Delumeau 1974: 456; my translation)

It can be argued that it is still the issue of the 'place' that is at stake here. In a similar manner to Christians redirecting towards saints the pre-Christian beliefs that had been in close relation to features of the landscape, Protestants intended to re-orientate the rituals that were directed towards human representatives of God – be they contemporary (e.g. members of the clergy) or long dead (saints) – towards God himself. By the fifteenth century, the intercessors originally introduced to convert pagan populations to Christianity had long become the recipients of popular devotion.[31] In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the socio-economic and religious contexts were such that people sought help from whatever or whomever they felt could provide it. A primary source of solace was the recourse to healing saints,

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[28] This is very clearly expressed in John Knox's *Buke of Discipline* (Laing [ed.] 1966, vol. 2: 189): 'And because that Electioun of Ministeris in this cursed Papistrie hes altogither bene abused, we think expedient to intreat it moir largelie. It apperteneth to the Pepill, and to everie severall Congregatioun, to Elect thair Minister: and in caise that thai be fundin negligent thairin the space of fourty dayis, the best reformed kirk, to wit, the churche of the Superintendent with his Counsall, may present unto thame a man quhom thai juge apt to feade the flock of Christ Jesus, who must be examinated alsweill in lyiff and maneris, as in doctryne and knawlege.'

[29] See Delumeau 1974: 487.

[30] 'Ainsi l'idôlatrie est partout dans le monde que condamne Luther et les idoles sont innombrables. Parmi ces dernières le Réformateur range le Pape, les évêques et les ecclésiastiques de l'Eglise papiste. Ils ont usurpé un pouvoir qui n'appartient qu'à Dieu, ils dirigent vers eux une vénération détournée de son véritable objet.'

[31] This was not considered idolatry by the ecclesiastical authorities since the Second Council of Nicea (787), inasmuch as 'religious veneration might be shown to likenesses (Greek *eikones*) of Christ, the angels and the saints without fear of idolatry, because all veneration shown to a likeness was received by the being whom it portrayed.' (Hamilton 1986: 42)

whose role was considered to be 'to conciliate the forces of nature and dispel the multiple dangers that surrounded them' (Delumeau 1981: 3; my translation).[32]

Contrasting strongly with this perception of the world, the Reformed Church stressed the need to reclaim a more direct link to God, and put the emphasis on individuals' responsibility; the need for intermediaries between man and God was thus negated. But by getting rid of intercessors between man and God, a certain void was created.[33] The fact that the clergy did not propose any kind of substitutes for the functions saints had held did not mean that the need for them had disappeared. In fact, Kirk Records prove that people still held to their old customs and beliefs, despite the condemnation from the Kirk, and despite all the acts that outlawed them.

The Kirk in Scotland was greatly assisted in its enterprise of reformation by its close links with the State. In the early years, Parliament acted on religious as well as secular matters, and both secular and ecclesiastical authorities had power to deal with offenders.[34] Indeed, it was made a criminal offence to visit wells for any curative purpose, or for anything else that could recall ancient beliefs and manners, as we know from *The Acts of the Parliament of Scotland.* The following act, 'Aganis passing in pilgramage to chapellis, wellis and croces and the superstitious observing of divers uther papisticall rytes' was passed on the 29th November, 1581:

> Forsamekill, as pairt for want of doctrine and raritie of ministeris, and pairtlie throw the pervers inclinatioun of mannis ingyne to superstitioun, The dregges of Idolatrie yit remanis in divers pairtes of the realme be using of pilgramage to sum chappellis, wellis, croces, and sic uther monumentis of Idolatrie. As also be observing of the festuall dayis of the santes, sumtyme namit their patronis, in setting furth of bain fyris, singing of caroles within and about kirkis and certane seasones of the yeir, and observing of sic utheris superstitious and papisticall rytes to the dishonore of god, contempt of the trew Religioun, and fostering of greit errore amang the peopill. For Remeid quhairof It is statut and ordanit be oure soverane lord with advise of his thre estatis in this present parliament, That nane of his hines lieges presume or tak upoun hand in tyme cuming to hant, frequent or use the saidis pilgramages, or utheris the foirnamit superstitious and papisticall Rytis, under the panis following videlicet: ilk gentill man or woman landit, Or wyfe of the gentilman landit, ane hundreth pundis. The unlandit, ane hundreth merkis, and the yeman fourtie pundis for the first falt. And for the secund falt the offendaris to suffer the pane of deith as Idolateris. And for the better execusioun heirof, commandis, ordanis and gevis power to all schireffis, stewartis, bailyeis, provestis, aldermen, and bailyeis of burrowis, Lordis of Regaliteis, thair stewartis and bailyeis and utheris quhome it sall

[32] 'pour se concilier les forces de la nature et écarter les multiples dangers qui les environnaient'.
[33] Jacques Le Goff has even argued that the saints, in their role of intercessors, helped, to a certain extent, to maintain people's devotion to God (see 1967: n. 3, p. 787).
[34] See Kirk (ed.) 1981: xxxviii-xxxix.

> pleis oure soverane lord to grant speciale commissioun to seirche and seik the personis passing in pilgramage to onie kirkis chapellis, wellis, croces, or sic uthir monumentis of Idolatrie. As alsa the superstitious observaris of the festuall dayis of the santes, sumtimes namit thair patronis, quhair thair is na publict fayris and mercatis, setteris oute of bainfyris, singeris of caroles within and about kirkis, and of sic utheris superstitious and papisticall Rytis. And apprehending thame in the actuale deid of the transgressioun of this present act, eftir spede Jugement of thair transgressioun to put and hald thame in presone and firmance, ay and quhill thay redeme thair libertie be payment of the panes abone writtin, and find cawtioun to abstene in tyme cuming, under the pane of doubling of the same pane. And gif the personis apprehendit be nocht abill to redeme thair libertie be payment of the saidis pecuniall panes, That then they keip the personis transgressouris in presoun, Irnis or stockis, upoun breid and wattir for the space of ane moneth eftir thair apprehensioun, causand thame quhen thai ar sett at libertie, outher find cawtioun or mak fayth to abstene thairefter. And in cais thei happin to pas furth of the schire quhair thai offend unapprehendit, That the schireffis and uther ordiner Juges of the nixt schire, burgh or Jurisdictionis apprehend thame and proceid in likemaner aganis thame. Declairand the ane half of the pecuniall panis to pertene to the saidis ordiner Juges for thair panes and for sustenyng of the personis to be kepit in waird, Irnis or stockis, and the uther half to be Inbrocht to the use of the puir of the parochin. (*APS* vol. 3: 212)

The first two lines of the quotation illustrate well the predicament in which the Reformers found themselves and the extent of the task they had set for themselves. Not only did they have to face the 'raritie of ministeris', a situation to be expected in these early days of change and one of the consequences of the 'want of doctrine', but they also had to deal with men's 'pervers inclinatioun' towards superstition.[35]

Apart from being listed in the Act of Parliament quoted above, we know that visits to wells formed a part of daily culture in post-reformation Scotland thanks to the ecclesiastical records. These are extremely detailed, not least because of 'the democratic structures of the Presbyterian Kirk which enabled a [close] scrutiny by the authorities of what the people were actually doing' (Rattue 1995: 110). The parochial sources are complemented by the records kept at the presbytery level which was resorted to when the matter in hand was too serious to be dealt with by the minister and elders of a single kirk.[36]

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[35] The concept of 'superstition' will be further analysed in the first part of the next chapter.

[36] '[T]here were three eventualities which might cause a session to send one of its cases before a higher court – the local presbytery ... First, some offenders were referred to the presbytery because their transgression was particularly serious ... Second, others might be "sent upstairs" because the offender (often a landowner) either refused to accept the session's authority or repeated the crime frequently. Finally, others still might come before the presbytery because their case offered unusual difficulties.' (Parker 1988: 3)

In fact, the records give us official and positive evidence that visiting wells was practised in Scotland not only at the time the records started, but also before then. An illustration of this is found in the Stirling records, where one reads that, on the 16th July 1583, Elezabeth Levenox 'grantit scho past to Chrystis woll *becaus hir foirbearis past thair* and becaus scho hade ane sair leg, and confessit that scho belevit the woll sould have helpit it' (Kirk [ed.] 1981: 150; my italics).[37] Likewise, the various levels of ecclesiastical records (from the General Assembly through the synods and presbyteries to the parish level) prove that the custom of going 'in pilgrimage' to wells survived long after 1581, despite the Act, for the ecclesiastical authorities needed to re-enact the interdiction several times. Theoretically, the General Assemblies laid down the line of conduct that the ministers of the different parishes should adopt. For example, at a General Assembly, held at Edinburgh in 1649, it was declared on 4th April that: '*The Assemblie, being informit that some went superstitiously to wellis* denominat from Saints, ordains Presbytries to *take notice thairof, and to censure these that are guiltie of that falt*' (E. Henderson 1879: 320; italics in the original). The presbyteries would pass on the General Assembly's decisions to each minister, who would then intimate the Assembly's decisions, as noted, for example, in the minutes of the 6th May of the same year (1649), in the records of Culross ('Culross' 1890: 26):

> This day the act against thos who resort to superstitious wells was publicly intimate and ordeined to be registrate as follows. The presbeterie hearing yt ther are sume resorting to superstitious wells for obteining helth to sick and distracted persons as also that ther are some that sends them and gives advices to goe that way, for preventing wherof in all tymes cuming the presbyterie ordeines that whosoever shall be found guiltie of the premiss that they mak their publick repentance in sack cloth before the congregaône.

In practical terms, it would appear that the successive Assemblies did not have much effect, and were treated rather lightly, since accounts of persons going to the 'superstitious wells' are to be found after this date. Almost a century after the establishment of the Reformed Church in 1560, the issue concerning the frequenting of the wells had not been resolved.

The presbyteries adopted different means to stop people 'resorting to superstitious wells'. One solution was to keep watch over the wells. In the early days of the Reform, the ecclesiastical authorities in Stirling, after having complained that the secular authorities did not do anything against the pilgrims going to Christ's Well,

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[37] Kirk's edition of the records of Stirling starts in 1581; these are the earliest complete Kirk-Session records to have been published (Graham 1996: 164), and they provide an invaluable tool.

near Falkirk, decided, on the 14th of May, 1583, to 'take enforcement into their own hands, commissioning their Dunblane-area colleagues to hide near the well on a Saturday evening "to espy quhat personis cumis to the said woll and report the naimis of sic personis as thai may gait to the brethrein".'[38] This approach seemed at first to have proved successful as two weeks later, on the 28th, the records read: 'the brethrein undirstanding that ane gret numbir of pepill hes resortit and resorttis in pilgramage to Chrystis well using thairat superstitioun and idolatrie ... ordanis ... the saidis personis quhais namis salbe gevin ... to the clark to compeir befoir the brethrein.' (Kirk [ed.] 1981: 120) However, and unfortunately from the ministers' point of view, such penalties did not dissuade their parishioners, for 'Chrystis well' continued to be resorted to. But the authorities were not to be so easily deterred, and, in July of the same year, another approach was tried. When Margaret Downy and Jonet Allan were summoned for the now familiar reason of 'using of superstitioun and idolatrie' they confessed that they had intended to 'have past to the said woll' (the usual expression used in the records to express the going to, and drinking from, the well). Yet they had not managed to reach the water, because 'ane certane halbert man', who apparently was responsible for guarding the well, 'struik them away' (Kirk [ed.] 1981: 140). Margaret Downy said that the reason why she 'was myndit to have past thair was becaus of seiknes scho had and belevit to have bein the better throw hir passing thair.' The attitude of the session to this confession seems rigorously fair, if somewhat unexpected; after hearing the women, the brethren 'findis the saidis personis nocht to have compleit thair pilgramage nor committit na idolatrie at the said well as utheris did' (id.). Consequently, they were 'bayth ordeinit to mak public repentence in the publict plaice appointit for penitentis in thair parroche kirk of Sanct Ninniane on Sonday nixt' (id.). They were ordered to 'mak public repentence' because they had intended to go to the well to be healed. This belief in the virtues of the water appeared to have been considered merely 'superstitious', as opposed to the charge of 'idolatrie', of which there is no further mention.[39]

Another alternative for the ecclesiastical authorities, was to attack the place directly – rather than simply placing wells under surveillance. An illustration comes from Seggat, in Auchterless (Aberdeenshire), and concerns both a well dedicated to St Mary, and the chapel standing nearby. Unfortunately, there are no Kirk-Session

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[38] Graham 1996: 170, quoting the records from Kirk (ed.) 1981: 115-116.

[39] Curiously, judgments appear in the records only for the individuals who admitted to their intention to go to the well, but did not actually complete their pilgrimage (see e.g. pp. 149-150). For those who went and performed the healing ritual, there is no indication of the punishment that was, in all probability, inflicted (the same entry, dated 16 July 1583, presents both instances).

records for the years that interest us.[40] The minister, Patrick Urquhart, seems to have been overwhelmed by the issue of the pilgrimages to the well, and thus to have referred it to the Presbytery of Turriff. In the Presbytery records,[41] the first mention of the 'well of Sigget' is dated the 10th August 1643, when an inquiry was ordered seemingly to determine who was going 'to the superstitious wells', so that the 'delinquantes' might be punished. The subject was mentioned again on the 12th October, and then disappears from the Presbytery records until 1649. By this point, a General Assembly had ordered that the chapel and altar near the well be demolished, and 'that a carne of stones be put upon the well of Siggett' (22nd November). There are then three entries repeating the order, until the 28th February 1650, when 'it is found that the well of Siggett is filled up'. Then, on the 21st of March, the next minister, Andrew Massie, 'signaled that the well of Siggett once filled up was emptied on the night be some evill affected personis; he is ordained (if he can get any tryall whoso thie were) to sumond them to the presbytery and once again to fill the said well and put a greater carne of stones upon the same'. This was done diligently, for on the 4th of April 'it is found that the well of Siggett is filled up again and a greater cairn of stones putt upon it'. What precisely happened between then and the next entry in 1652, we shall probably never know, but the well must have been emptied of the stones again because it reappears in the records, over two years after the matter had apparently been settled. On the 25th of November, 1652, 'The Presbiterie recommands to Mr Andrew Massie to cover the well of Sigget with stones and to use diligence for trying who frequent the same for superstitious worship.' Not only did the poor minister have to deal with the human side of the issue – and he seems to have had a real problem with his parishioners – but the natural elements were also to be reckoned with; on the 16th December, Massie let the presbytery know that 'there can be nothing done in that business for the present because of the unconstancie of the weather and the shortness of the day but he promises to use diligence thereanent whensoever the day becomes longer and the weather more constant'. However, four months later the well was still not filled up with stones and on the 10th of March 1653, 'Mr Andrew Massie is exhorted to be myndful of his promise'. The reason, or at least one of the reasons, why it was so difficult to get the well filled up transpires in the next entry, dated 31st of March: 'Concerning the wol of Sigget, Mr Andrew Massie does declare that he has dealt with the orders thereanent but can not get them moved to waire [expend] anie more

[40] In 1904, the minister of Auchterless, Alex. A. Duncan, noted that the surviving Kirk-Session records only began in October 1706 (1904: 21).

[41] The Presbytery Book of Turriff, 1642-1688, is held in the National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh (ref. CH2/1120/1). The quotations are from the manuscript, unless otherwise stated.

paines in it, but notwithstanding he promises for himself that if no man will take paines on it he shall yock [hire] servants to it on his charges and that his diligence shall be seene by the brethren as they go along to the assemblie.' At last, Massie's determination was recognised by the brethren, who relieved him from dealing with the locus, but enjoined him to continue to maintain his surveillance of his parishioners. Thus, on the 4th of May, the records read that 'Mr Andrew Massie has used diligence anent the well of Sigget: and, as he reported, has done all that can be done for the tyme. Onlie it is recommended to him: that he will search and take notice wha does frequent that place for superstitious worship.' It is the last entry concerning the well of Siggett; in the face of such opposition, the well and the 'superstitious worship' that had been going on, drop from the records.[42]

To my knowledge, this is the first time that these extracts from the *Presbytery Book of Turriff* are being published, presenting all the information concerning the 'well of Sigget'.[43] Some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources only used a summary of the events, focusing on the fact that the well had been twice filled up and emptied as a proof of how deeply rooted in people's minds the custom of visiting wells was.[44] However, the full version shows that there is more to the records than just this. Firstly, they bear witness to the determination of the Kirk to pursue its mission to eradicate traces of 'superstitious worship'. Secondly, they give us an insight into the relationship between a parish minister and the presbytery to which he was accountable. The brethren met in Turriff seemingly every two weeks, expecting Massie to be present and give a report about his parish. Although the distance between Turriff and Auchterless is not great (about five miles), there is a feeling that the Presbytery does not concern itself with the practical aspects of its ordinances. For instance the weather and shortness of days would not have been different in Turriff and in Auchterless, yet the difficulty that they would cause in the implementation of their 'orders' does not seem to have been relevant. This might be a case of over-interpretation of the text, but it might equally be an indication of a certain disconnection between local and higher authorities, and thus between people and the Kirk. Thirdly, although the accounts provide us explicitly with only one side of the recording of the events, the ecclesiastical one, the parishioners' role is nevertheless present, even if it consists in negative evidence: through Massie's declaration of the 31st March, we know what his villagers were *not* ready to do. The active response to the filling of the well with stones is certainly important, but because it was

[42] The well does not reappear in the records at least until 1663, at which point the manuscript is in such a condition as to make it very difficult to read.
[43] For a full presentation of the extracts concerning the well of Seggat, see Appendix 1.
[44] See Temple 1894: 133; Duncan 1904: 20-21; MacKinlay 1910: 110; MacPherson 1929: 42-43.

anonymous – 'some evill affected personis' operating under the cover of the night to empty it – it did not denote the same determination on the part of the people as their passive resistance did. Indeed, the minister's indication that if he could not get people to fill the well – presumably of their own accord and free of charge – he would take it upon himself, and with his own money, to see that the presbytery's orders were carried out, implies an even more serious resolve – on both parts. Finally, and by contrast, the last entry reads as a clear admission of the powerlessness of the authorities; the surveillance of the well and of his parishioners was all that was left for the minister to do.

There is still further evidence proving the ineffectiveness of the prohibitions concerning the well of Seggat, as it was still being visited in the nineteenth century. The minister of Auchterless parish in 1840 wrote in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland* that 'Within the recollection of some of the oldest inhabitants, money, and other articles, were deposited on Pash [Easter] Sunday by those whose superstitious feelings led them to frequent the well, in expectation of some benefit to be derived from drinking the water dedicated to the Holy Virgin' (Dingwall 1840: 287). A subsequent minister of the same parish even provides 'the spell used, after depositing money or other gifts to the Saint', which was:

> Chapel well and Chapel water,
> Drink it and ye'll get better. (Duncan 1904: 21)

It has to be noted that the case of Seggat is far from being the only instance where the Kirk had to relent on the issue of abolishing pilgrimages to healing wells, and various causes of different natures can be determined.

The first cause is quantitative and concerns the number of people involved in superstitious practices. It was one thing to condemn one person, but it was an entirely different matter to expose a whole community. Indeed, when too many people were involved, as was seemingly the case in Kingussie in 1643, the examiners of the book of the kirk 'found therein no censure of haunters to superstitious wells and places the reason being that the minister alleged all wer guilty' (Cramond 1906: 69). On a qualitative level, the second reason relates to the high social rank of some of the pilgrims, whose position of authority may have prevented them from always conforming to the kirk's views. Thus, Lady Aboyne, who was the daughter of the Earl of Errol and married one of the sons of the Marquess of Huntly, used to visit the well near the Chapel of Grace (near the River Spey). She was from a Catholic family, and the following extract is from a journal kept by her priest and confessor, Father Blackhall:

> [This well] had bein of old a very devote place, and many pillgrimages had bein made to it, from al the partes in the Northe of Scotland; but then there was nothing standing of it but some broken walles, which the minister made throw downe within the chappell, to hinder people to pray there; a great devotion of their holy Covenant, rebellious both to God and their King. [Lady Aboyne] used to make that pillgrimage every year so long as she had health to do it, a mater of threttie milles from her own house, wherof she made two of them afoot, and barefooted, next to the Chappell'. (Stuart [ed.] 1844: 71).[45]

The destruction of the locus is here again illustrated – as is the fact that it did not deter people from going to these places they considered sacred. But it was not only noble – and Catholic – pilgrims that the Kirk had to fight for going to that well, as we learn from the *Records of Elgin* which tell us how Thomas Andersone was 'demitit of his eldershipe befor the sessione', for frequenting the Chapel of Grace as late as 1664 (Cramond [ed.] 1908: 303).[46] If even the elders paid visits to wells, it seems that all the efforts engaged could not succeed.

The eighteenth century, however, marked the beginning of the fading of the custom of visiting wells from the official records, and it stopped being mentioned as systematically as before. Two explanations, the one not exclusive of the other, can be proposed for this gradual disappearance. The first one underlines the irony of the situation: the lack of interest on the authorities' part reflected, or perhaps triggered, a more general attitude towards the custom. Voltaire captured the spirit and ambiguity of the situation very well when he wrote that 'There are no witches left since they are not burnt any more.' (1756)[47] Which brings us to the second point: witches were not being burnt any more because they had ceased to exist, that is, in the preoccupations of the persons in power. In Scotland, the Witch Act of 1563 was repealed and replaced in 1735 by a new Witch Act, which 'admitted only the crime of pretended witchcraft' (Larner 1981: 78).[48] This did not mean that the practices had completely

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[45] Lady Aboyne died in 1642 and, from the father's account, she might have been able to make the pilgrimage until 1630.

[46] Sometimes the well is not even mentioned; however, saying that someone had gone to a chapel implied a visit to the adjacent well. See for instance in the Elgin records, the entry of August 3rd, 1627: 'All these confessit be ther avne depositioun that they kneillit about the Chappell and drank of the vater...'; and on November 2nd: '*Receavit folkis bein at the vell* – Elspet Hay, Agnes Grant, Jonet Gordoun, Issoble Car receavit fra the piller for going to the cheppel at Speyside' (Cramond [ed.] 1908). The last extract indicates clearly that the well and its chapel were strongly associated and interchangeable in the minds of the ministers, and that the mention of one implied in fact the use of both.

[47] 'Il n'y a plus de sorciers depuis qu'on ne les brûle plus.'

[48] In France, similarly, witchcraft was considered a mere fraud by Louis XIV and his council in 1682 (See Camus 2001: 4).

disappeared, but rather that the perspective in which they were seen was gradually shifting. This change was but one part of the Enlightenment movement, which started a discussion on, among other subjects, the notion of the 'good savage', and the repercussions civilisation could have on the 'primitive mind'. It was during this period that the concept of 'folk culture' was first used, as it was 'when traditional popular cuture was just beginning to disappear that the "people" or the "folk" became a subject of interest to European intellectuals.' (Burke 1994 [1978]: 3) In Scotland, by the end of the nineteenth century, visits to healing wells had become a fashionable subject of study, in so far as they were believed to represent a modern form of a superstition with very ancient roots, akin to magic and primitive forms of religion. Thus in 1896, the editor of *The Caledonian Medical Journal* (vol. 2 [8]: 257) was able to write, about the wide occurrence of popular beliefs in the Highlands of Scotland concerning medicine, that it 'suggests the possibility of tracing them to a common source, and to a time when the racial differentiation which now prevails did not exist. ... This tracing of common beliefs to a common source may yield ethnological results of incalculable importance.' [49]

Part 3 – Antiquities, folklore, and ... the Internet

Seen through the eyes of nineteenth-century writers – who were mostly ministers and doctors: the intellectual elite or dominant class – the visiting of wells for their curative powers represented a superstitious attitude, based on naïve beliefs to be found in the popular layers of society. The emphasis was not so much on the religious deviancy it implied, but rather on the lack of 'culture', the ignorance, it betrayed.[50] Thus could James Walker, the minister in Muthill (Perthshire), write on one of the healing wells in his parish, the well of Struthill, that:

> [It was]... by the credulous ... much sought after, as its virtues were considered effectual in curing madness. Doubtless, its celebrity was altogether owing to the artifices of the avaricious religionists, who, it would

[49] The tone was similar in a later publication by Charles Squire (1912), which had a broader scope – that of Celtic beliefs. There the romanticisation of a past Celtic civilisation is plainly recognisable: 'What concerns us is that we are face to face in Britain with living forms of the oldest, lowest, most primitive religion in the world – one which would seem to have been once universal, and which, crouching close to the earth, lets other creeds blow over it without effacing it, and outlives one and all of them.' (Squire 1998 [1912]: 416)

[50] Mitchell (1880: 145) proposed that certain beliefs and practices, including going to wells for healing and leaving offerings, were 'not necessarily pre-Christian and pagan. [They] may spring up ... as the outcome simply of man's mental constitution. A superstitious practice with this origin may acquire power and fixity, especially over the ignorant – who in such matters form a wider class than they do in ordinary matters.'

> appear, practised on the superstition of frequent visitors, to call forth their liberality in the shape of offerings cast into the well. (1845: 314)

His stern judgment on the credulity of the 'frequent visitors' of the late seventeenth century deeply contrasts with his conclusions about the situation at the time of his writing, when he remarks that 'such delusions have now happily passed away.' (id.) This view coincides with that of other ministers writing for the *New Statistical Account*, such as Alexander Lochore, writing from Drymen (Stirlingshire) about St Vildrin's well that: 'The world has either grown wiser, or these waters have lost their virtues, since not a knee bows now before the stony saint.' (1845: 102) By contrast, antiquarians and folklorists looked for, and found, evidence that it was still a living tradition. The disparity between what ministers and antiquaries observed probably resulted from the role of the former in trying to eliminate the custom; parishioners would not have told their minister that they were still going to a well to get healed![51]

Different attitudes towards both the data collected and the mode of collection can be discerned within the body of gatherers of Scottish lore. Some, like J. F. Campbell, set about the task in a very professional way, sending collaborators to help in the collection of material. Campbell not only took note of the stories and tales, the publication of which made his fame in the field, but also became interested in folk practices, even admitting to what would perhaps be called nowadays 'participant observation':

> Holy healing wells are common all over the Highlands; and people still leave offerings of pins and nails, and bits of rag, though few would confess it. There is a well in Islay where I myself have, after drinking, deposited copper caps amongst a hoard of pins and buttons, and similar gear, placed in chinks in the rocks and trees at the edge of the 'Witches' Well'. (1983 [1860], vol. 2: 145)

Campbell does not offer a judgment on the custom, nor on the people practising it; a precursor of modern ethnography, he believed that there was value 'in the study of popular traditions as a record of human thought, history, manners, customs and laws' (Dorson 1968: 401). There is no trace in Campbell of a condescending tone. Others, however, showed more discriminatory tendencies. An example of what less impartial writers could produce on the same subject of healing wells is met in Ellen Guthrie's book *Old Scottish Customs* (1885). This is one of several publications by various writers drawing more on past observations on the subject than their own findings. These are essentially historical books, but sometimes a remark is slipped in, which

[51] See Devlin (1987: 5) on the same situation occurring in nineteenth-century France.

gives information on the more recent, or even contemporary, situation. We find such a piece of information in Guthrie about healing water, and there is no doubt as to how she regarded the customs and beliefs associated with wells:

> There are numerous Holy wells in the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland, which were much resorted to in cases of sickness by the more superstitious of the peasantry, and even yet in certain remote districts the old superstition still lingers. (p. 17)

This statement appears to be misleading on two accounts: it was not only the 'peasantry' who frequented healing wells, as has been shown above; and a healing ritual involving the use of water was witnessed in Edinburgh in 1883 – not a 'remote' place by any stretch of the imagination.[52] It does nonetheless tell us that 'superstitious' and 'superstition' were still part of the current vocabulary and imagery surrounding these practices – as it had been over a thousand years before. So, was the 'superstition' of the antiquarians the same concept as that of the Church, Reformed or Catholic?

The concept certainly needs to be defined before we are able to understand the attitudes towards it. From a historical viewpoint, it can be regarded as the opinion of the current ideology in power on the belief system it has replaced. When several systems are found to be coexisting, then it can become a term used by any of the communities to describe any other than itself. 'Superstition' possesses the quality of alterity: it characterises what the other thinks or believes in; it belongs to the shadowy paths of heterodoxy.[53]

Different periods have produced different definitions of what constitutes a superstition, emphasising its dependent relation to history. In other words, what is understood to be 'superstitious' varies according to the historical context. In 1879, James Napier, a Scottish antiquary, wrote that superstition was made up of 'Beliefs and practices founded upon erroneous ideas of God and nature.' (p. 4) The use of 'erroneous' clearly implies that there are 'right' and 'wrong' sets of beliefs, the latter encompassing paganism and Catholicism alike. It is interesting to note that, over a century later, the definition given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* – 'excessively credulous belief in and reverence for supernatural beings' – could be applied to any form of religion, perhaps thus betraying the predominantly rational ethos of the present time. It is this rationality, together with scientific progress, that, ultimately, changed the nature of visits to healing wells.

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[52] Walker 1883: 163-164.

[53] The practical aspects of superstition – the beliefs and rituals – in relation to healing are dealt with in Chapter 3.

However, the change in the nature of the visits, or, more precisely the shift that seems to have occurred in the motivations and aspirations of the modern 'pilgrims', has not meant the disappearance of the custom – far from it. The study of three wells in the Northeast of Scotland will serve to show how their use has developed. They are: St Boniface's Well in the Black Isle, on the A832 road to Munlochy; Craiguck or Craigie's Well, also in the Black Isle, overlooking Munlochy Bay; and St Mary's Well in Culloden Woods, south of Inverness.

St Boniface's lies immediately by the road with a wood stretching behind it, and cultivated fields and farm buildings facing it on the opposite side of the road. It is the most spectacular well-site of the three, and probably of all the Scottish rag-wells. Facing it, one fully understands the name of 'clootie well' that has been given to these healing wells where people tie a piece of cloth on the vegetation surrounding the spring.[54] As the photographs of the site show (figs 2.1; 2.2, p. 30), the trees are literally covered with various pieces of garments and recent additions include Tibetan prayer flags, football shoes, a fake-pearl bracelet, and wishes for a relative on scraps of paper...[55] The incredible variety of what visitors have left behind illustrates, I believe, the confused knowledge they have of the custom, in terms of what is to be done at the well, as well as what it is 'traditional' to ask. The cluster of beliefs and practices associated with wells possesses a complex nature in that it belongs to this vague and ever-changing intellectual category of 'popular culture'. The acceptations and shortcomings of such an expression have been treated in Chapter 1; suffice it to say here that the position I am going to adopt regarding these particular customs, and their performance in contemporary Scotland, is therefore one of comparativism. The practices performed around wells with a therapeutic aim that have been recorded in sixteenth-century Kirk-Session records provide the researcher with a 'model' against which it is possible to compare subsequent variations. This does not imply a qualitative judgment on the part of the observer; there is here no 'right' or 'wrong'. Simply, the impartial evidence at our disposal offers an invaluable means to record variations – a historical standard.

[54] On the particular function of these 'cloots', see particularly Part 2 of Chapter 3.

[55] The flags and sports shoes were present when I went to the well in March 2000; I noticed the bracelet and papers – in perfect condition – in a later visit in September 2001.

Figure 2.1 - St Boniface's Well, Black Isle (May 2000)

Figure 2.2 - Tibetan prayer flags at St Boniface's Well, Black Isle (May 2000)

In the case of St Boniface's Well, the variations and apparent confusion seem to be linked to its extreme accessibility. Healing wells are usually secluded, or at least located away from the common paths and ways of circulation; the 'getting' to the well plays a role in the cure, it represents one part of the healing ritual. The situation of St Boniface's Well, however, is different. It is easily reachable compared with the 'standard' ex-centred locations of other wells. This may have played a role in the change in its function. From 'healing' the well has taken on the quality of 'wishing'. The use of the word 'wishing' should not be regarded as a sign of a decline in the 'status' of the well, for it shows a certain spiritualisation, or intellectualisation, of the process. The water is not taken for itself, as a remedy; instead one could argue that the numinous character of the place appears to be most relevant now. The healing properties of the water are no longer sought after, but rather whatever supernatural powers that were believed to give the water its special quality. Hence, perhaps, the nature of some articles left, like the football shoes; in perfect condition when I spotted them, they might play the role of *ex-votos*, symbolising a request, or representing the acknowledgement of, and thankfulness for, a granted wish. This spiritualisation of the custom of visiting wells is further illustrated by the presence of the Tibetan prayer flags. During my last visit to the spot (16 September 2001) I noticed the presence of a box nailed to one of the trees, filled with flyers exhorting those of the visitors in spiritual distress to call the given number.

If the well is not a healing well any more, but has become, to all intents and purposes, a wishing well, what then of the innumerable rags tied in the trees? This is where the confusion resides; visitors leave their piece of cloth – sometimes a whole sweater or overalls – as they would a coin. The cloots do not stand for illnesses that one washes away with the water from the well, as used to be the case.[56] They have taken on the function of mementos; they are the sign that the person who left his or her contribution was there.

Another reason for pilgrims to leave their item at a well was outlined by James MacPherson in 1929: 'Many who perform this ritual act cannot be conscious of any malady they wish to transmit, they are only conscious of keeping up the traditions of the fathers.' (p. 60) He had previously remarked that: 'The last stage in the story of

[56] Incidentally, some inhabitants of Rosemarkie, a nearby town, told me that St Boniface's started its 'vocation' as a clootie well after the Second World War; before that time, it was used by the travellers to water their horses. However, Gregor mentioned it as a healing-cum-wishing clootie well in 1894; the contradiction here may come from the fact that the original well seems to have been situated higher up on the slope, as opposed to the trough for watering horses that was built at road level, possibly in the mid-1950s.

the holy well is when it is regarded merely as a "wishing well", a place of resort for holiday makers, who on the sacred day, observed from of old, wend their way to the goal of many a pilgrimage, cheerfully express a wish, and leave some small coin as an offering.' (id.) He was passing this dismissive remark on St Mary's Well in Culloden, and, as we shall now see, he has been proved right on several counts.

There is no doubt that a great number of people still visit the well situated in Culloden woods, just south of Inverness. A short and pleasant walk – part of a sign-posted walking trail – leads to the site of the well, which has been enclosed in a high circular cement wall; the water itself has been channelled so that it now forms an almost stagnant pool in which dead leaves from the trees around accumulate (figs 2.3; 2.4, p. 36). Whatever the motivation behind it, rags are still being left on the trees around the well, and during one of my visits there (15 March 2000), two particular trees caught my attention. One was covered with blue ribbons on which male first names had been written with the date; while yellow ribbons festooned the other, with female names and the date also. Altogether, they must have represented fifty individuals who most likely formed part of an institution – a school, a nursing home, or suchlike – which may have organised an excursion to the well as to one of Scotland's famous monuments.

This is not a recent phenomenon, as an amateur film made shortly before the Second World War showed different kinds of people – navy recruits, young women, and families in their best suits: the perfect 'holiday makers' described by MacPherson – flocking towards the well, on a remarkably sunny day.[57] The daughter of John Edgar, the man who had filmed the scene, commented that she could remember going there as a child with the other children of her Sunday school; it was considered a great opportunity for an outing, and sandwiches were brought for a picnic.[58] A very similar sort of atmosphere was described in an account published in *The Times* of the 25 May 1957. The article also illustrates the evolution that took place, in the use of the well, which had originally been resorted to for its healing properties and now was considered simply to be a wishing well: [59]

> 'A Highland Tradition from long before Culloden', from a correspondent, *The Times*, May 25, 1957.

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[57] The film, dated 1939, was shown on 'The Way It Was', a television program from Grampian Television, broadcast on the 14 November 2000. John Edgar's daughter was presenting her father's films.

[58] It does seem ironic that the Kirk, whose obduracy in eradicating the custom cannot be doubted, should end up organising picnics at one of the 'superstitious wells' it used to denounce.

[59] It seems that the healing virtues of the well were already almost forgotten in 1911, when Henderson noted that :'Old men are known to have held that in their early days its waters had distinct healing powers.' (p. 321)

In summer-time touring buses by the score, on their way to or from Inverness, stop for a few minutes by the commemorative cairn on Culloden Moor, so that visitors may inspect the site of the last battle fought on British soil, and see the graves of the clansmen who died there, fighting unavailingly for Prince Charlie, on April 16, 1746. But it is not at mid-summer, but in the Spring – on 'Culloden Sunday' early in May – that the native Highlanders keep their tryst on Culloden Moor.[60]

They come then not to honour the dead, but to seek the promise for the future, by drinking the crystal clear water of the wishing well in the valley north of the battlefield. This year I joined in the pilgrimage, and indeed all roads on that Sunday afternoon led to Culloden. We came by bus, private car, motor bycicle, push-bike, and on foot, from all the airts.

We were a friendly crowd, of all types, ages and conditions, teen-agers of both sexes mostly predominantly, but little family groups with small children came along too, and soon the path leading down hill to the well was covered with a kaleidoscopic mass of moving humanity. Happy humanity because, although a cold north wind was blowing off the snowy slopes of Ben Wyvis and churning up the blue waters of the Moray Firth, the sun was beating down on us, the wild cherry was in bloom, and the larch sported her tenderest, freshest green, while the black-faced lambs frolicked in the adjacent fields.

AGE-OLD CEREMONY

There could be no doubt about it. We were witnessing here the miracle of the annual rebirth of Nature, and were unwittingly, engaged in some age-old ceremony whose origin was now lost in time.

Before the Reformation the well was known as St Mary's Well, and it is more than likely that, as often happened, the early Christian missionaries had taken over, and made respectable, a pagan shrine which might have already existed for thousands of years. The ritual, at any rate, of those distant days, has survived the centuries: first a coin must be thrown into the well, a tribute to the spirit dwelling there; then a sip taken of the water, a charm taken against evil; and then, after the wish, a 'clootie' or small rag, must be tied to the branch on an over-hanging tree. This is considered so important that this wishing-well of Culloden is now known far and wide as the Clootie Well.

Sure enough, as the path dipped down into a glade of trees with the encircling stone of the well in their midst, we saw clooties all around, far too many for one tree alone, they were tied indiscriminately to the branches of fir, and spruce, and beech. Rags there were of all colours, blue and pink and white. Some of the fresh ones were tied in trim little bows, others, that had withstood the winds of winter, hung limp and discoloured. So they must hang until another winter has rotted them away; to remove them would bring bad luck, if not a transfer of the very afflictions of which the first owners had been trying to rid themselves!

'DRINK AND WISH'

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[60] The prescribed date used to be the first of May (the ancient quarter day of Beltane), and evolved into its modern alternative of the first Sunday in May. The reasons for, and implications of the choice of this particular date of the first of May are further explored in Chapter 4 – Liminality.

> Originally, the well was probably considered to have a curative value, but to-day we have forgotten all about that, and, as we are marshalled into a queue at the entrance to the well by an attendant policeman, we are all firmly concentrating on our wishes, our most secret thoughts, as we search our pockets for a coin and a 'clootie'. Everything has been made easy for us. One by one we pass around the well, and hand to our neighbour the enamel mug, so thoughtfully provided, from which we have drunk. But for the moment when a mother bids her child 'drink and wish', we walk in silence, somewhat over-awed by the occasion, for even the teen-age boys go quietly in and out, solemnly tie their clooties to a tree.
>
> So ends the ritual for another year. The wishing-well must be left behind, and we must climb up the hill again to the modern world. Lest we should have forgotten all its amenities, we find, carefully placed as a half-way house, a tent where the more exhausted can refresh themselves with ice-cream and lemonade, and when at last we have reached our goal, the car-park, we find a van dispensing fish and chips, which are being consumed by picnic parties tucked in the lee of the hedge.
>
> The happy faces of some couples reveal that their wishes have already come true. The magic of the old Clootie Well has worked yet again, and, to modern young lovers, fish and chips may seem in no way an unromantic end to a happy and memorable day.

This extensive, bucolic description encapsulates several features of the modern attitude towards clootie wells. The incongruous presence of a policeman strongly emphasises the institutionalisation of the custom – it also perhaps indicates the recognition by the civil authorities that 'folklore' and its manifestation can contain nationalist, i.e. disruptive, elements, and thereby draw together a large number of people. That this could have been the case at St Mary's Well on the day the 'correspondent' wrote about is made not so unlikely by the preamble to the article. The mention that the site of the battle of Culloden was visited by many people in a national newspaper such as *The Times*, even in relation to such an innocent custom as going in pilgrimage to a well in the woods nearby, could be read as carrying a certain political agenda: despite the Jacobite defeat and its consequences for Scotland's cultural and linguistic traditions, still at least one had survived, 'whose origin was now lost in time'. In other words, here was a custom that not only owed nothing to England, but had also been handed down, from one generation to the following, continuously. This political use of folklore has been commented on by Richard Dorson, for instance, and although he was writing about the situation in the mid-nineteenth century, his remarks could equally be applied to the recent situation in Scotland:

> In time, folklore studies in Scotland, Wales and Ireland moved from a spirit of local patriotism toward an attitude of national separatism. Nationalists

> asserted their rights to an ancient cultural heritage submerged under English history, literature and language; in the case of Ireland, the folklore movement contributed to the goal of political independence. In this respect, the course of folklore research was following a path marked out in many countries where a new or revitalized nationalism drew nourishment from the traditions of the people. (1968: 392)

Over thirty years later, the view that nationalism feeds on local and folk traditions remains just as accurate. This phenomenon has been further accentuated and developed with the help of multimedia resources, including the global source of information that the Internet and the World Wide Web constitute, as these are being used to propagate a certain image of Scotland as a nation to foreign onlookers.[61] Thus, on a website dedicated to sacred wells throughout the world, under Scotland, the page displayed when 'Clootie Well' is selected is in fact a link to another site, headed 'Gathering of the Clans', which gives information about Beltane customs, and among these, visits to Clootie wells.[62] Items of general knowledge are offered – such as 'Wells were seen by the Celts as bringers of good health' – alongside succinct directives as to what to do and when, taking the viewer through the steps of the ritual:

> The well [St Mary's] is visited by Highlanders on the first Sunday of May, that being the day dedicated to the sun.
> People arrive long before dawn (and originally should have been away from the well before sunrise, however this is no longer observed). Before drinking from the well you must first walk three times 'sunwise' around it, and offer a silver coin. Finally, you must tie a rag to an over-hanging tree.[63]

It had previously been explained about the rags that they 'are tied on the surrounding trees by pilgrims to make a wish.' There is no trace of doubt here: the rags left

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[61] This was confirmed by the release, in 1995, of two films on two very different Scottish 'heroes'. These films were the infamous *Braveheart*, and the lesser well-known *Rob Roy*. Both convey a biased and romanticised view of Scotland, that thrives on the reciprocal antagonism between Scotland and England, and the depiction of the Highlanders' hard way of life, imbedded in their natural environment, as a kind of 'ideal', but lost, life.

[62] The address of the website on wells is: www.bath.ac.uk/~liskmj/wellsweb/wellsonweb. The link offered for 'Clootie Wells' is: www.tartans.com/beltaine.html.

[63] It is interesting to compare these instructions to these reported to readers of the *Celtic Magazine* over a century before, mainly for the difference in the tone of the communication, but also for the variety of alternatives proposed, which differs markedly from the sober directions given above: 'Pins, rags, threads, pebbles, shells, nails, buttons, bits of rowan tree, small coins... were left in the neighbourhood of the well, thrown into it... Then the ceremonies to be observed included standing in the water, kneeling in or near it, washing with, or bathing in, or drinking of it. There were some [wells] at which it was necessary to lie for a certain time near the water, on set days, and thereafter go round a fixed number of times... The ceremonies, in a word, were as various as the offerings were numerous, while both were equally unmeaning and ridiculous.' (Fraser 1878: 353).

Figure 2.3 - Cloots hanging at St Mary's Well, Culloden Woods (May 2000)

Figure 1 - Visitors tying their cloot at St Mary's Well, Culloden Woods (May 2000)

behind by the visitors to the well bear no direct link with the idea of an illness left on the rag.

However, and to refer back to the article published in *The Times*, the warning that touching the cloots hanging on the trees could mean bringing on oneself 'the very afflictions of which the first owners had been trying to rid themselves', forms the link between the forgotten healing powers of the well and the modern ritual. This widespread belief – that touching one of the rags can bode ill consequences[64] – also apparently accounts for the accumulation of material at St Boniface's Well. Despite protests from local inhabitants and their requests to have the area cleared and cleaned, nothing has yet been done to that effect, and some say that this is because nobody wants to touch the rags.[65] Although offering two different contexts – historically and geographically –, these two wells – St Boniface's and St Mary's – seem to present a similar situation concerning the function of the rags. Drawing from all the material put forward on that aspect of the custom, I think it unlikely that the pieces of material are left as part of a healing ritual. However, the awareness that this is what they used to represent still seems to form a part of the local common knowledge.

As for Craiguck's Well, although also situated on the Black Isle, it could yet not be more distinct from St Boniface's. For one thing, there is no road leading to it, as 'It springs out between two crags or boulders of trap rock, and immediately behind it the ground, thickly covered with furze, rises very abruptly to the height of about sixty feet.' (Hone 1827, vol. 2: 638) At the top of the cliff, pasture fields spread out to a dead-end, single-track road serving a few farms. Turning one's back to the spring, Munlochy Bay opens out to the south only a few feet below. To reach the well, one has to walk a few miles from the nearby village of Avoch on the shore round the bay.[66] In other words, there is little probability that visitors would happen to be at the well by chance, because they were driving past or taking a walk in the woods.

Craiguck's Well is remarkable in that, despite being relatively well documented, it is still resorted to in its capacity of healing well, although nowadays mostly by the people coming from the village of Avoch. I write 'despite' because it seems that in the cases of both St Boniface's and St Mary's, the information widely available has

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[64] The belief that taking something that someone else has left brings bad luck (see e.g. Polson 1926: 144) is also found in connection with the coins that are thrown into the water (see Gregor 1892: 66-67).

[65] I was told this by different persons living in the area, when I visited the Black Isle in May 1999 and again in May 2000.

[66] There used to be – until 2001 – an access through the fields which has been cut out by the erection of new fences.

led to their changing function. The site of Craiguck's Well, however, is not a touristic venue, and seems to have retained a certain confidential character – although 'retain' may be the wrong verb, as a nineteenth century account describes a large party gathering there. In 1827, J. S., a reader of William Hone's *Every-Day Book* sent in his account of the 'First Sunday Morning of May (Old Style) at Craigie Well, Blackisle of Ross' (vol. 2: 638-639), in which 'crowds of lads and lasses' are reported to have gone to the well to partake of its waters (p. 639). The author goes on to describe the general atmosphere, quite loud and rowdy, setting the scene at the well 'before the sun should come in sight; for, once he made his appearance, there was no good to be derived from drinking of it.' (id.) The specification of the time is interesting as it recalls beliefs associated with liminality, an issue that will be further developed in Chapter 4. The extract finishes with the following paragraph:

> The sun was now shooting up his first rays, when all eyes were directed to the top of the brae, attracted by a man coming in great haste, whom all recognised as Jock Forsyth, a very honest and pious, but eccentric individual. Scores of voices shouted, 'You are too late, Jock: the sun is rising. Surely you have slept in this morning.' The new-comer, a middle-aged man, with a droll squint, perspiring profusely, and out of breath, pressed nevertheless through the crowd, and stopped not till he reached the well. Then, muttering a few inaudible words, he stooped on his knees, bent down, and took a large draught. He then rose up and said: 'O Lord! thou knowest that weel would it be for me this day an' I had stooped my knees and my heart before thee in spirit and in truth as often as I have stoopet them afore this well. But we maun keep the customs of our fathers.' So he stepped aside among the rest, and dedicated his offering to the briar-bush, which by this time could hardly be seen through the number of shreds which covered it. Thus ended the singular scene.

This passage, particularly Forsyth's unexpected declaration of faith that 'we maun keep the customs of our fathers' perhaps gives us an insider's explanation as to why the Church failed so obviously to impose its will on that subject. It was not so much that the people concerned were still visiting wells because they did not generally follow or respect the teachings of the Kirk, but that the custom appealed at a different level. The practice included them in a tradition, a way of life fast disappearing, sometimes even already extinct by the time the article was written, giving to the people and the place, a feeling of continuity.

Having this extract in mind when I visited Craiguk's Well on the 7 May, 2000, I found the reaction of the modern pilgrims remarkable in that it was not so different from that expressed by Jock Forsyth.[67] The first people I talked to were a couple,

[67] This was the first Sunday of the month, the date prescribed for visiting the well.

around seventy years old. I was standing below the well, at the bay level, so that I would see, but without intruding on the action. She had brought a plastic mug to drink from the well. The path to get to the water was very muddy and slippery, and as he needed to use a stick to walk, he did not get to the water himself. She filled the cup, drank from it, then tied a handkerchief just above where the water springs. She drank again, then passed the plastic glass that had been left previously at the well to her husband so that he could drink too. When I saw that they were about to leave, I walked up to talk to them.[68] The man was born in Avoch, and his wife was from Dingwall, in the north of the Black Isle. He said that he had been going to this well for seventy years, and his wife for fifty-six years – she added that they had been coming every year except one, which was missed because they were away on holiday. The man recalled that, as a boy, his mother would take him to the well at this time of the year, which coincided with the start of the herring-fishing season. His father, who was a fisherman, would be at sea, and his mother used to say: 'Go drink from the well and wish for a year's good health and a good fishing season for your father'. 'So that's what we did', he concluded. Before they left, she made sure that he finished the water that was in the cup, so that he would be assured a year of good health. Then she went to replace the cup in the well, where she had found it, refilled her own mug, drank and came back to her husband.

This conversation encapsulates, I think, both the continuity and the evolution of the practice since its recording in the first written sources we have for Scotland (sixteenth century). We can see how the well is unequivocally associated with wishing, but it has nonetheless retained its healing characteristics – the two seem to naturally merge into the wish for a year of good health. I found that this well was particularly linked to a sense of belonging to the township of Avoch. Some inhabitants said that it used to be a village outing; people would walk from the village around the bay, perhaps bring picnic baskets with them if it was a nice day. In the neighbouring community of Rosemarkie, by contrast, the people I talked to said that they knew of the well, but did not visit it; I was told several times, and in a somewhat disdainful tone that only the people from Avoch go there on the first Sunday of May... Unconcerned with these rivalries, another lady came to the well that morning, with her two grand-children, one of whom was carrying an empty bottle to bring back some water to the rest of the family who had stayed at home. She said she used to come here with her grandmother, who used to live at the end of the track road after the field above the well, every first Sunday of May. The presence of

[68] They did not wish to be recorded, but I was able to write down our conversation immediately after it had taken place.

cattle in the field puzzled her, and she remarked that the farmer usually made sure that the field was clear on that day, so people would not be scared to go the well – and would not disturb the animals either.

Figure 2.5 - Craiguck Well, Black Isle (May 2000)

Conclusion

In the conclusion to this chapter, I would like to underline the importance of the Scottish example in allowing us to see the development of an 'age-old' practice – to phrase it as the anonymous *Times* correspondent did – throughout the centuries, and to try to provide an explanation as to why the repeated endeavours to solve the 'problem' of sacred wells failed to work.

The idea that the core of the problem could be tackled merely by getting rid of the external symbols of superstition was one common to both medieval Christians and the Reformers. The various tactics each employed have been discussed above, and shown to have been highly inefficient. To fight against the wells was to some extent to acknowledge their efficacy and it is very likely that extreme measures only confirmed people in their beliefs; destroying a well did not stop pilgrims, neither did the penances they had to endure when caught. In a similar manner to the medieval Church which had denounced pagan practices in such a document as the *Indiculus* for instance, the Protestant authorities judged the system they had superseded equally offensive. In France where the Reformation was followed by the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic authorities were also very aware of the existence of popular superstitions and strove to eradicate them. As Delumeau wrote (1968: 6): 'The two Reformations – that of Luther and that of Rome – constituted, despite the reciprocal excommunications, two complementary aspects of a same process of Christianisation.' (my translation)[69] Indeed, in France, the Counter-Reformation and later the secularisation of the State have meant a blurring and erasing of certain customs or the knowledge of the meaning of those that have survived. The strong Catholic influence – not quelled entirely by the French Revolution – has had for consequence that it is not easy, for the folklorist or ethnographer, to tell the Christian 'imports' from the 'original' customs, partly because of the lack of records. On the contrary, the Reformation in Scotland, by showing great consistency in its refusal to compromise, has left an amazingly precise trace of what was happening in the country, which has made it possible, to a certain extent of course, to distinguish between Christian and non-Christian patterns of behaviour. The beliefs and rituals that are going to be described and analysed in the next chapter certainly tend to present a non-Christian aspect which seems to have survived across the centuries.

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[69] 'Les deux Réformes – celle de Luther et celle de Rome – constituèrent, en dépit des excommunications réciproques, deux aspects complémentaires d'un même processus de christianisation.'

This continuity may be the corollary of the need people had, or felt they had, of help from the sacred waters of healing wells. The powers attributed to healing wells form, somewhat fittingly, the likely reason behind the sustained appeal these wells still constitute for pilgrims, past as well as present. Scientific and medical advances have certainly initiated a change in the practices observed at wells, as I hope I have illustrated in this chapter. The most salient point, is perhaps that, before such developments took hold, the belief that water could cure was extremely strong – so strong that individuals were prepared to defy successive ecclesiastical authorities. It is to these beliefs held by the Scottish people about healing wells, and the associated customs, that I shall turn in my next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

HEALING RITUALS

Introduction

As I hope I have shown throughout the previous chapter, visiting wells held such an important place in the belief system of people in Scotland that, no matter how adamant, the authorities never managed to eradicate the custom. Notwithstanding the recent perceptible change towards 'wishing', sacred wells were, prior to that, mainly resorted to in their capacity as health-givers, or health-restorers. This quality is, as has been proposed, what has kept them in use, in spite of all the official efforts to bring pilgrimages to wells to an end.

This chapter, dealing with healing rituals, will first be concerned with the concepts and beliefs that surround them. Because historical religious sources mention 'superstition' in relation to healing processes, we will look at what precisely was considered superstitious, and, by contrast, what was acceptable, by successive authorities. The historical aspect of the concept has been discussed in the previous chapter; the practical side of 'superstition' is what will be dealt with here. This means that the relations between 'superstition', 'magic' and their official counterpart 'religion' will be explored, particularly in their association with the medical sphere. The use made of water in healing rituals will serve as a focus throughout the chapter.

Once a conceptual frame for the rituals has been established, the rituals themselves will be presented and their different components analysed. Thus, the role played by silence in the performance of the custom will be developed, as will the function of rags ('cloots'), that was only briefly touched upon previously. Rituals generally tend to be a very conservative part of human social manifestations,[1] and we certainly found that, in the Scottish context, more than the practices themselves, it was their meaning and the expectations that the performers had invested in them that

[1] J. C. Heestermann proposes that one explanation for this is the way ritual is detached from any kind of contingencies: '[The ritual] has nothing to say about the world, its concerns and conflicts. It proposes, on the contrary, a separate, self-contained world ruled exclusively by the comprehensive and exhaustive order of the ritual. It has no meaning outside of its self-contained system of rules to connect it with the mundane order.' (1985: 3) We will see a consequence of the absence of context of ritual in Chapter 5 for instance, when people were said to carry on performing a ritual circuit without knowing why they did it. Because of its 'self-contained' characteristic, there is no readily available means to uncover the original meaning of a ritual once it has been lost. However, one has to keep in mind that, although the original meaning may disappear with time and social changes in a given community, the ritual still needs to retain some relevance to that community in order to keep being performed; in that respect, Heestermann's definition perhaps calls for a slight amendment.

had mostly changed, perhaps unsurprisingly. Fortunately, the ways in which rituals were conducted have been recorded in various sources, for a period which stretches over centuries. In the same way as we have seen examples of the general practice of going to a well previously, we are now going to examine early modern and modern historical sources describing the healing process.

Before we turn to the belief system underlying the ritual involved in going to a healing well, I would like to make a *proviso*: I have tried, wherever possible, to use sources that involved the participants directly or, failing that, accounts by direct witnesses of the custom being performed. This means that the character of the 'healer' is mostly absent from my thesis. He or she will appear in relation to charming, as charms were one of their prerogatives, but the focus will tend to remain on the practices themselves.

Part 1 – Superstition, medicine, magic and religion

At the source of any healing process lies the concept of illness. As obvious as this may appear, it needs nonetheless to be stated so as to be able to go back a step in the process, that is, to go back to the origins of the illness. The origins or causes are important for they will influence the cure. In other words, a disease only represents the symptoms of some kind of disorder; according to the nature of the disorder, appropriate solutions will then be devised and applied. This holistic approach to medicine, greatly developed by the ancient Greeks, placed man and his environment in a perpetual relation of exchanges. When something happened in the microcosm – the sphere under man's influence – it had repercussions in the macrocosm – governed by the gods – which in turn held consequences for the microcosm. This pendular mode of communication with the other world will be found to be at the basis of most healing rituals presented here.[2]

Although one could say that this arrangement or interrelationship has lost most of its significance today, it should not obscure the fact that it was extremely relevant in terms of folk systems of healing, before the spread of a more 'scientific' approach to medicine.[3] Until the development of scientific techniques that allowed physiological and biological reasons for illness to be found, disease was mainly thought to be the result of two principal causes. First, it could represent a god's punishment of a person's misbehaviour: a straight exchange, so to speak, between man and the

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[2] I shall come back on that particular aspect of the practices to see how it ties them to a sacrificial context.

[3] See Lloyd (ed.) 1978: 9.

supernatural. Hence the cure came from prayers and the appropriate expiation of one's faults, perhaps with spiritual help from a priest or a minister in a Christian context. Second, it could be brought upon one by someone else, the consequence of malevolent thoughts or intentions from another person. In that case, help could be sought from a third party, a healer or cunning man or woman. In both situations, however, disease was treated as a foreign presence, a foreign body that needed to be expelled from one's own body. As a confirmation of this view, a Scottish medical doctor observed in 1896 that in the past, in the Scottish Highlands, 'the prevailing hypothesis was that disease was a distinct entity – a power inhabiting the body, for evil in most cases, for good in some; in the former to be propitiated according as the fancy of the physician or patient might dictate, in the latter, to be allowed to run its course.' (Fraser, pp. 258-259) The presence of a 'physician' would not, more often than not, have been available in remote areas until relatively recently; or if it had been, it is doubtful that people would have been able to afford his services – leaving them to deal with the illness on their own, or with the help from those two antagonistic characters who belonged to the religious and non-religious spheres (the priest or minister and the healer).

Suffering, fear, and a certain helplessness when natural disasters struck – epidemics, epizootics, abnormal weather – constitute the major factors for beliefs in supernatural, or at least preternatural, manifestations. Faced possibly permanently with these concerns, people sought comfort in the often numerous supernatural beings who inhabited their world. Not only could these entities lend comfort, but they could also provide an explanation for what had happened – perhaps by being thought to be at the origin of, for example, bad crops. In the case of illness, people could go to a healing well and perform there the ritual through which the water, and/or its tutelar spirit, would restore their health. The question as to whether the cult was one directed at the water itself or at supernatural figures believed to act through the medium of water (Desmet 1998: 11), seems to me to be a moot point, as it may have had little relevance to the populations concerned. In fact, even the early medieval Christian writings such as the sermons composed by Caesarius of Arles exhort the populations in which pagan practices[4] have survived, sometimes to abandon 'the cult of wells' (*Sermon* 13.5; Delage 1971: 427) and on other occasions to stop 'praying near wells' (*Sermon* 14.4; id.: 439),[5] so that it seems reasonable to think that these two lines were not mutually exclusive – they perhaps even appeared

[4] The term 'pagan' is employed here in the same sense as it would have been by Caesarius, namely: 'all religious behavior and belief that he could not ascribe to Christianity or Judaism.' (Klingshirn 1994: 201)

[5] The sermons read respectively: '*ad fontes ... vota reddere*'; and '*ad fontes orare*'.

equivalent.[6] In any case, men's future, whether immediate or remote, could be acted upon by them, insomuch as propitiatory rites could be performed, sacrifices offered to 'Nature' and its manifestation (e.g. spring, tree). These rites were believed to have an influence on the next 'message' from the other world, in the pendular way mentioned above.

The idea of 'helplessness' I used above needs to be further explored, and, as we shall see, slightly amended too. 'Helplessness' implies that people could only have a very small impact on their general condition, and that when they did, their influence on the outcome still was not assured. It is important here to distinguish the scholar's perspective from the point of view that the people under study might have had. From a modern, academic point of view, one can argue that people were objectively 'helpless' and at the mercy of nature, in so far as they would not have been able to prevent the next drought or storm, or perhaps to predict who would fall sick and from what. Contrasting with this view, the use of divination practices, healing charms or fertility rituals indicates on the contrary that people believed it was possible to take control over the natural elements. Anthropologist Hildred Geertz seems to agree that this was indeed the case, in that '[t]he assumption behind spell-saying might be that one's own efforts will have important effects, that the forces of the natural world can be made to do one's own bidding.' (1975-1976: 83, n. 16) What Geertz calls 'an attitude of confidence in the taking of direct personal action' (id.) is a notion which one does not find expressed very often, but is in fact, I believe, a key point in the understanding of the wider conceptual background to healing, divinatory, and fertility-oriented rituals. I shall illustrate here only briefly why I think this is the case, as every step cited will be further explored below. Firstly, as will be demonstrated shortly, sacrifices in healing rituals have not only a propitiatory quality, but also contain a coercive aspect that forms part of their effectiveness. Secondly, such a mode of thinking – that magical practice could provide control over nature – was presumably at the centre of the difference between Christian and non-Christian beliefs, a difference that proved impossible to resolve for centuries, until progress initiated an irreversible shift in the perception of nature. Finally, and as a consequence of the second point, the notion of balance that underlies this mode of thought – that human beings and supernatural forces share power – will be helpful to show how popular healing practices clashed with the Christian ideology.[7]

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[6] The ambiguity in the beliefs described by Brigitte Caulier for contemporary therapeutic cults at wells in France certainly echoes this situation (Caulier 1990: 84).

[7] It will also be a useful tool when dealing with the concept of man's debt to Nature, as presented in the chapter on ritual horse-racing (Chapter 5).

The first point I would like to expand upon concerns the notion of sacrifice, as I believe it is central to the meaning and performance of the healing rituals – rituals which will be further discussed in Part 2 below. Pivotal to religions such as Hinduism, and these of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the notion of sacrifice is also useful for the period that witnessed the conversion to Christianity in early medieval Western Europe, as indeed it is in the early modern Scottish context. The term itself is heavy with connotations, and it is difficult for 'blood' not to spring to mind every time 'sacrifice' does. Considering all these types of association – with animal or human blood more specifically – the fact that in the Vedic tradition, the primal sacrifice consists of the *soma*, the drink of the gods, is too often overlooked.[8] Blood need not be present for a sacrifice to be effective. What will decide, ultimately, the efficacy of a ritual lies with its performance, hence with its performer. In that respect, the intention and faith of the sacrificer – whether it is the person asking for a deity's attention(s) himself, or herself, or whether it is someone who has been paid to do it on his, or her, behalf – are paramount.[9] The use of the term 'attention(s)' is deliberate and helps, with its twofold meaning, to refer to the two main types of favours man can ask from his gods. On the one hand, a deity can direct its attention towards the sacrificer: that would be the case in the instance of a cure, where nothing quantifiable is given. On the other hand, attentions (i.e. presents) in the form of good crops, for example, could be at the root of the sacrificer's motivation to perform the sacrifice.

In order to demonstrate how the notion of sacrifice is relevant to the performance of healing rituals, in general as well as in the particular case of Scotland, I will draw upon the work of an Indianist, Charles Malamoud. Although Malamoud's sphere of interest is the ancient commentaries on the Vedas, the *Brahmana*, I hope that the general value of his statement will come through. He writes:

> In ancient Brahmanism, however, the order of the world rests upon sacrifice (*yajña*), and more generally, upon the rites of which sacrifice is the supreme form and the model. It is indeed the sacrifice offered by men that confirms the gods in their divine status and that, thus, ensures the harmonious putting into place of the forces that allow the regular succession of the seasons and the formation of the foodstuffs prescribed to each of the classes of beings..., and thus, the whole organisation of society. (1989: 97; my translation)[10]

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[8] On the importance and role of the soma, see for instance Renou 1981 [1950]: 23. Closer to us, in terms of space and time, ritual cakes were sacrificed during the ancient Greek festivals of the *Thesmophoria* and *Arrephoria*, dedicated to Pluto and Aphrodite respectively (Daraki 1994 [1985]: 120-122).

[9] See for instance Lévi-Strauss (1962: 268).

[10] 'Dans le brahmanisme ancient, en revanche, l'ordre du monde repose sur le sacrifice (*yajña*), et plus généralement, sur les rites dont le sacrifice est la forme suprême et le modèle. C'est en effet le sacrifice offert par les hommes qui confirme les dieux dans leur statut divin et qui, donc, assure la

The link between sacrifice and the order of the world on one side, and the mutual confirmation of the place and role of men and gods as a consequence on another, can be applied illuminatingly to the rituals which took place at wells. Thus the ceremonial that unfolded there represented at the same time the acknowledgement that the order of the world had been interfered with – the illness was the result of that state of affairs – and the means to bring it back to order – the role taken by the rags left at the spring, as we will see below. The call upon the water and/or its tutelary spirit for a cure through the leaving of a piece of clothing served, ultimately, as a means of reiterating the respective positions of man and Nature. As was remarked above, it would be false to assume that this position was one of subservience on man's part. As Lévi-Strauss remarked, one of the functions of sacrificing to the gods was indeed to oblige the gods to take notice of, and react to what had been offered to them. Reasoning in terms of continuity and communication between man and the divinity appealed to, he proposes that the object of sacrifice, as it is by definition destroyed in the process of sacrifice, created a 'plus' on the side of the divinity, at the same time as it left a 'minus' at the human level. His conclusion, then, is that:

> ... as [man] had previously established a means of communication between the human container and the divine container, the latter will automatically have to fill up the void [created by the destruction of the victim during the sacrifice], by according the expected blessing. The scheme of sacrifice consists of an irreversible operation (the destruction of the victim) in order to trigger, on another level, an equally irreversible operation (the granting of divine grace) ... (1962: 270; my translation)[11]

Of course, the irreversibility of this series of operations could take on a double-edged quality, for if the sacrifice was not conducted properly, the answer from the otherworld would at best not come, and at worst would consist of further hardship for men. Different reasons could be given for a lack of success which all amount to the fact that the ritual was not performed strictly in accordance with the prescriptions. In the Indian context for instance, the prayers could be thought to have been badly chanted; or perhaps the wrong foodstuff was offered relative to what had been asked

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mise en œuvre harmonieuse des forces qui permettent la succession régulière des saisons et la formation des aliments propres à chaque classe d'être..., et donc, l'organisation d'ensemble de la société.'

[11] '... comme [l'homme] avait préalablement établi une communication entre le réservoir humain et le réservoir divin, ce dernier devra automatiquement remplir le vide [créé par la destruction de la victime durant le sacrifice], en libérant le bienfait escompté. Le schème du sacrifice consiste en une opération irréversible (la destruction de la victime) afin de déclencher, sur un autre plan, une opération également irréversible (l'octroi de la grâce divine)...'

for. Yet all these explanations represented another way to confirm man's power over the preternatural. Presenting the failure as his sole responsibility took the initiative away from the gods. And it was important that man's power be acknowledged on these occasions, because, by definition, they occurred only infrequently.[12] This temporal dimension of the sacrificial operation – or in fact of any type of sacred ritual, be it concerned with healing or divination – meant that it happened, it was carried out only at certain particular moments in time.[13] The superiority over the divine assumed by man lasted only the length of the ceremony, thus managing to preserve a balanced state, a natural order on which human society could prosper in the face of adversity.[14]

This confirmation of the natural order of society was not entirely alien to early Christian missionaries in so far as the celebration of the sacraments, from baptism to last rites, can itself be seen as the re-enactment of the Christian ordering of the world. But this was possibly one of the few similarities between Christian and non-Christian religious systems. Apart from the notion correlated to sacrifice that man can control Nature – even though only in special circumstances and to a certain extent – the second important disparity between the two systems concerned the representation of the world. It is of interest to us here because the understanding, available at a certain point in time, of the 'mechanics' of the world will greatly influence the definitions, produced during that period, of such concepts as 'magic' and 'superstition'.

As was shown in the previous chapter, in order to overcome all the difficulties in successfully converting local populations, incorporating some of the autochthones' ways of dealing with life's incertitudes constituted a more efficient manner to reach out to them, more so than suppressing entirely all of both their spiritual and material resources.[15] We must be careful about how words like 'assimilation' and

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[12] Despite the fact that the scales seem to tip in favour of Nature with respect to the 'sharing' of power, I would argue that men's prerogative to initiate and perform a sacred ritual when they need it, as well as at designated times, put them in a position literally as powerful as Nature.

[13] This concerns the broader issue of liminality, which applies to both spatial and temporal margins, and it will be treated in the next chapter.

[14] An anecdote from the island of Lewis illustrates well how the supernatural, in this case the Christian God, could be held accountable for what happened in human lives, in terms of responsibility and balance of powers: '... the standing corn of a certain township having been destroyed by a severe gale, the old men of the district assembled in council and valued the loss they had sustained on their Maker, believing that he was under obligation to make it up for them as it was caused by the wind. When he heard the story, Mr MacPhail was greatly struck by the ignorance and profanity of such a procedure. His informant, however [about ninety-five years old in 1855], was of a different opinion, said it was anything but that, and to substantiate his views gave the following story as an authentic fact. He said that before the men that were valuing left the place where they had assembled, a shoal of fish came into the bay and did not leave for a whole year. And though most of their corn was gone, they nevertheless had abundance of food owing to the amount of fish they used.' (MacPhail 1895: 169)

[15] Practically, it would have been impossible to completely remove the customs: as Flint points out (1994 [1991]: 79) the sheer number of 'magicians', to use her terminology, made it unrealistic to hope

'incorporation' are used. The idea that the Church accepted local customs as they were, only giving them a superficial Christian gloss, is too simplistic and indeed misleading. In fact, it was not so much a case of taking an alien custom into the Christian context, but rather of proposing Christian equivalents to some non-Christian practices. For example, one of the purposes of miracles was to demonstrate that the preternatural powers of God were superior to those of local deities or monsters. The belief in the supernatural was thus accredited at the same time as the arguments in favour of a conversion to Christianism were clearly illustrated.[16] Flint argues that the provision of Christian equivalents to certain popular beliefs and practices stemmed from a well-thought-out political strategy – as we have seen in the previous chapter – that took into account the practical need to accommodate people in some aspects of their tradition, the better to win them to Christian faith. This is certainly a valid point, but past that first layer of political strategy emerges a very simple and powerful argument, namely the impossibility for the Church either to offer material alternatives, or, more importantly, to provide a new system for comprehending the surrounding world. As Geertz pointed out, a complex of customs, because it is based on a certain perception of how the world is organised, can only be supplanted if the replacing set of customs is based on a different perception of the world. I quote her at length here, for the point she makes is a very important one, underlining the profound reason behind the failure of the Christian Church (early Christians as well as Reformers) to eradicate those practices it chose not to accommodate:

> The force behind faith in astrological predictions or in curing by spells lies not in the severity of danger in the situation, nor in an anxious need to believe in an illusory solution to it, but in a conviction of their truth. These practices are comprehensible within the framework of a historically particular view of the nature of reality, a culturally hidden conceptual foundation for all the specific diagnoses, prescriptions, and recipes [for a given period and place]. The common linking element is not a psychological attitude but an ontology. The particular beliefs continued to be immune to the skeptical or empiricist onslaught as long as the more general, unarticulated view of reality remained undisturbed. (1975-1976: 83)

The general validity of her argument is undeniable: as they shared the lives of the peoples they were trying to convert, being in the same way at the mercy of epidemics and starvation, the missionaries did not find themselves in a position to provide answers regarding people's fears and their suffering from disease. However, it seems

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to remove them 'at one blow'.

[16] See e.g. Flint 1994 [1991]: 251; 267-268.

to me that Geertz underestimates the power of the 'fear factor'. Fear was a definite parameter and it played an important role in the popular perception of the world.[17] As Flint summarises it: 'Where nature is thought to encompass all that is not purely *human* nature, where its forces appear to be hostile and where reasoned knowledge of its working is small, the possibilities for preternatural intervention will be feared.' (Flint 1994 [1991]: 6) For one thing, early Christians would not have had any better knowledge of the intricacies of the world than their non-Christian contemporaries. Secondly, providing Christian parallels to non-Christian customs only proved that the former really only constituted an alternative, not a replacement, and indicated a similar comprehension of the general ways of the world. In any case, the Church's acceptance of some practices and the replacement of others with their Christian equivalent meant that the distinction between non-Christian and Christian practices could become blurred, which gave to the Reformers one of their main arguments against Catholicism and the performance of 'popish' and 'papistical' rites.

Beyond a similar general knowledge or perception of the world, the gap between the Christian and non-Christian systems lay in how they identified the position of man within his environment, as well as his interaction with it. From this divergence of views stemmed the categorisation of practices into 'magic' or 'religious', the dismissal of some beliefs as 'superstitious' and the acceptance of others as 'medical'. In essence, two discriminating factors could be applied by the Church to decide whether a healing practice was a magical or a legitimate one: the one concerned the human level – to whom one should address oneself to get healed – while the other looked at what kind of supernatural power was called upon – the Christian god or non-Christian entities.

As regards the issue of the mediator, the Christian message was clearly that outside the Church no salvation was possible, which was important for several reasons. To begin with, as illness was assumed to be sent by God in punishment for one's sins, only He could remove it, perhaps through a priest in his role of His temporal agent.[18] In Darrel Amundsen's words, 'The well-being that Christianity offered was to be in a right relationship with God, which depended upon being in a right relationship with the church.' (1998 [1986]: 73) Next, this entailed that recourse to outsiders to the Church could not be allowed – and this was aimed at all varieties of folk healers – under the risk of damning oneself. For instance, calling upon a soothsayer who would manipulate natural substances, and invest words with a

[17] This should not be seen as contradicting my earlier point that people were not helpless but on the contrary that they could take control in specific and selective ways, as fear presumably could trigger the decision to take ritual action.

[18] See Amundsen and Ferngren 1998 [1986]: 45.

specific power was considered to be making use of magic, in that the soothsayer acted as if *he* could control natural forces.

In respect to the means of obtaining a cure, the ideal outlook of the clergy on illness – that it could 'serve to correct one's sins, refine, admonish, produce patience, lessen pride, make the afflicted an example of fortitude and virtue to others'[19] – hardly tallied with the reality and consequences of illness on one's life.[20] However, it certainly contributed to the development of pilgrimages to holy places and sanctuaries. Going on pilgrimage to a Christian sacred well to partake of its healing water was then not only a demonstration of one's virtue, but it was also acknowledging God's power, or more precisely the dedicated saint's intercessionary power, to perform miracles. Thus, in Scotland, St Ninian's burial place at Whithorn was visited by many sick pilgrims in the hope that anything that was or had been in contact with the saint, dead or alive, would bestow a cure. Various medieval documents on St Ninian and his sanctuary describe

> miracles of healing including paralysis, leprosy and blindness. These cures were wrought by various means involving the tomb, the relics, soil (presumably from holy places), the saint's clothing, water recovered from washing the bones, and a lost holy spring or cistern. (Yeoman 1999: 44)

It is not hard to see, in retrospect, why this kind of devotion, which developed to a greater or lesser extent depending on the presence of holy relics, made sanctuaries a prime target of Protestant reformers' doctrine, as they considered reverence to saints to be idolatrous. In his *Buke of Discipline* (1560), John Knox defined what fell under that word: 'By Idolatrie we understand the Messe, Invocatioun of Sanctis, Adoration of Ymagis, and the keeping and retenying of the same: and finallie all honoring of God, not conteaned in his holie Word.'[21] This affected many places, less prominent than Whithorn, especially the wells that had been placed under saintly patronage – as we saw with the case of Turriff in the previous chapter. Thus, the standard phraseology used in session records, such as the *Stirling Presbytery Records* (Kirk [ed.] 1981: 130) reads: 'The quhilk day ane summondis beand producit lauchfullie execute and indorsit ... to answer at the instance of the kirk for passing in pilgrimage to Chrystis woll and using of superstitioun and idolatrie thairat expres againis Goddis law, undir the paine of disobedience...'.

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[19] Amundsen and Ferngren 1998 [1986]: 59-60; see n. 74 p. 63 for references in Christian writings.
[20] I am thinking here in terms of the work that one would not be able to do, creating an imbalance in one's family, and in the community, members of which would perhaps be asked to help.
[21] Laing (ed.) 1966, vol. 2: 188-189.

The concept of 'superstition' and the practices seen as superstitious in the eyes of Protestant theologians are now going to be examined. The use and meaning of the term have been applied and understood variously in different periods. Thus, while we have seen that, for the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-centuries writers, superstition was linked to a certain ignorance of the scientific laws that govern nature, by contrast, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, superstition was, essentially, a misguided religious practice, based on fallacious belief. The early modern definition of superstition was influenced by Thomas Aquinas (d.1274) and grouped together such activities as idolatry, divination, and the vain observance of rituals. As Stuart Clark commented: 'Aquinas and his early modern imitators thus arrived at a typology of illicit behaviour capable of absorbing whole areas of popular life and thought.' (1997: 477) By the second half of the sixteenth century in Scotland, however, as expressed in the Witchcraft Act of 1563, it encompassed 'Witchcraftis, Sorsarie or Necromacie', the use of which meant the death penalty for both the 'usar abusar and the seikar of the response or consultatioun' (*APS*, vol. 2: 539). Almost twenty years after this act, 'superstition' was again used, but in a slightly different context as it dwelt more on typical and precise practices such as the pilgrimages to wells and crosses, or the singing of carols in certain locations and at certain times (cf. the Act of Parliament quoted in Chapter 2). Care should be taken that the use of a single word to describe such varied activities should not lead us to confuse or amalgamate its diverse connotations. Thus while the Witchcraft Act implied the maleficent use of magic practices, the Act preoccupied with the pilgrimages to healing wells had no such sub-text. Thus there was a certain awareness in Protestant writings of the wide range of activities that could be grouped under this one term, and which comprised 'the enormous repertoire of rituals for good health, healing, and fertility, for preventing misfortune, and for divination which existed outside or along the borders of official religion and yet was constitutive of much of early modern popular culture.' (Clark 1990: 62)

So despite the fact that the link between magic powers and the healing virtues of wells was acknowledged, a distinction was made between witchcraft and the superstitions of common people. Notably, the use, or absence, of spoken formulae seemed to have been one of the criteria used by the Church to decide the nature and gravity of the offence. This was a very serious issue, since the influence – and the presence – of the devil was seen behind words of magic, which could bear grave consequences. In 1575, Niels Hemmingsen published in Copenhagen *Admonitio de superstitionibus magicis vitandis*, in which he defines the nature of magic: 'A magical superstition is therefore anything that comes from the Devil, through the

medium of human beings, by whatever is imagined to be in words, signs, figures and characters, whether an express agreement with the Devil occurs or not'.[22] Maybe as a safeguard against the risk that too many people would be accused of witchcraft, a finer distinction could exist between witchcraft and the use of charms. While the former used words as incantations or curses for maleficent purposes, the latter was a beneficial practice and used words as invocations.[23] Some examples of charms and invocations will be presented towards the end of this chapter.

Inasmuch as invocations were often based on Christian prayers, they posed a problem of a semantic order to the ecclesiastical authorities – how could the Devil be at work within the Word? This oxymoronic situation was solved to some extent by denying charms and rituals their hitherto assumed efficacy. The teachings of the New Testament were only that: teachings. Attributing qualities to things and beings that went beyond their real value was considered an implicit admission of having dealings with the Devil.

> It was assumed ... that everything in the creation – the human beings who acted on it, as well as the things on which they acted – had been given its own attributes, virtues, and properties. Any effect lying beyond these various capacities could only be achieved, or even hoped for, if some agency with the ability to substitute alternative efficacies was also involved. (Clark 1997: 480)

The 'agency', in the case of rituals, was of course the Devil. Following this line of reasoning, rituals themselves represented but a succession of empty actions, devoid of any meaning. Yet, as we shall now see, this was not so for the people who performed them.

Part 2 – Visiting healing wells: the rituals

Water was used for healing purposes because people believed in its efficacy.[24] Asking why or how it worked in Part 1 of this chapter, we found that the water was

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[22] Quoted in Clark (1990: 67), who comments 'Since the devil wished to subvert the pure religion of the Word, his first task was to corrupt the sense in which words were efficacious'.

[23] These distinctions and their practical consequences are discussed by Joyce Miller (2000: 278-280).

[24] On the question of belief in relation to our subject, it is not desirable to merely retreat behind arguments such as 'whether people believed or not in the efficacy of what they did is not relevant, what matters is that they did it'. My use of the term 'believing' is not done lightly or without cause, for it is found in the records, employed by the very people who practised visits to wells to get healed. On 16 July 1583, 'Compeirit personallie the said Jonett Mairtein and grantis *scho past in pilgramage to Chrystis woll, and thereby belevit* to have bein lichter of hir bairne scho was with, and past ainis about the woll and wische hir feit and handis with the waltir thairof...' (Kirk [ed.] 1981:151; my italics). Again, as I argued in the previous chapter, it is mainly belief in their power that has kept

thought to possess magical, preternatural powers, which we can now accept as our working hypothesis. Numerous other items could be present in healing rituals – from stones to silver coins to animal substances – but our object does not consist so much of the recipes and various *materia medica* in common use, as of the elements of the rituals *per se*, without which the cure would not have been effective.

The principal consequence of supernatural, that is ab-normal, forces being used by human beings in fairly common circumstances (illness and ailments were presumably not a rare occurrence in early modern Europe) was that certain precautions needed to be taken. This leads us to the issue of the need for a ritual in healing practices, a ritual which far from being empty, possessed in fact a twofold function. On the one hand and to a certain extent, the ritual gave its sacred character and thus its efficacy to the spring,[25] and on the other hand, it concurrently procured an ensemble of precautions to be taken in order not to contaminate – and be contaminated by – the sacredness of the place. Both functions can be inferred from the following extract from Stirling Presbytery Records, in which the sequence of the ritual appears very clearly through the declaration of one Thomas Patersone:

> At Striviling the xj day of *Junij*, 1583... compeirit the said Thomas Patersone and being accusit be the moderator for his passing to the said woll... the said Thomas confessit he past to the said woll to gait his haill becaus he is seik lyk as he hes bein this lang tyme and that he past sone gaittis [sunwise] about the woll and sat doun on his kneis and prayit, and drank of the woll and cust waltir on his hed and wosche his hed and breist and tuke ane peice of the breist of his sark [shirt] about ane bus [bush] besyd the woll and left it thair. (Kirk [ed.] 1981: 132)[26]

Thomas Patersone describes very precisely how, because he had felt sick 'this lang tyme', he went to Christ's Well to get his health. To do so, he circumambulated the well sunwise (*sone gaittis* in Scots, corresponding to the Gaelic *deiseil*). He followed this action by a prayer, then drank and washed the presumably affected parts of his body – head and chest –, and finally took a piece of his shirt in contact with his chest and left it on a bush 'besyd the woll'. All these different steps composed the healing ritual that was performed at a well when one was sick. It has to be noted, however,

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clootie wells existing – be it to heal or to grant a wish.

[25] To a certain extent only as certain wells were famous for their healing virtues outside the performance of the ritual – St Mary's Well in Culloden Woods for instance. However, the ritual would still be necessary to legitimately hope to be cured.

[26] Stirling records are extremely valuable for they provide the earliest direct evidence of healing rituals as they were performed at wells. This instance, among others, gives us a proof that 'clootie wells' existed in Scotland almost forty years before the 'earliest' British evidence of 1618 traced by Jones (1992 [1954]: 95).

that additional prescriptions can be found in other accounts – for instance one had to remain silent, the water was not allowed to touch the ground, and the ritual needed to be performed at a certain time. The observance of all these actions could be said to compose the 'ideal' ritual and each of these elements will be considered below, except for the temporal aspect (in general the pattern of behaviour was to arrive at the spot before the sun had risen, or after it had set), which will only be treated briefly here as it will be further developed in the chapter on liminality (Chapter 4).

Circumambulation

First and foremost was the walk around the well, that is the circumambulation of the well. This was the first physical action to take place and its symbolic meaning and implication are extremely significant within the ritual. The link between healing ritual and sacrifice that I have proposed above usefully underlines the sacred dimension of the practice, which meant that precautions had to be taken before, during and after its performance. These precautions were absolutely necessary because the two spheres – divine and human – that are usually separated and distinct became, while the ritual was performed, joined and indistinguishable. This implied a change in the very nature of both the place and the performer, giving them a liminal quality, which created a 'dangerous', extra-ordinary situation. Walking around the well constituted a means to diffuse that danger. It enclosed the water and thus aimed to demarcate two different regions opposed to one another in their essence: the one corresponds to the inside, sacred space created by the circling, while the other spreads around and outside that enclosure and corresponds to the profane. This demarcation can be seen as possessing a two-fold purpose: not only does it serve to affirm the sacred character of the site, but it also acts at the same time as a protective 'barrier'. As Eliade concluded on the dichotomy sacred/profane and on the requirement to enclose sacred spaces: 'The enclosure does not only imply and indeed signify the continued presence of a kratophany or hierophany within its bounds; it also serves the purpose of preserving profane man from the danger to which he would expose himself by entering it without undue care.' (1979 [1958]: 371) Although the sort of enclosure Eliade referred to was the solid type (e.g. a wall), it may also exist only as a mental construction, whereby the action of walking round the object creates a spiritual fence, as is the case with a spring for instance. In this situation especially, the circumambulation acts as a kind of antechamber: i.e. a space to undergo preparations during which the nature of the pilgrim will become altered so that he or she will be able to seek contact with the sacred, and remain unharmed.

Linked to the performative character of ritual, which means that it does not only protect the pilgrim, but also creates the sacred space, the walk around the well creates a different time frame for the pilgrim. The repetition of the action, be it three, seven or nine times, emphasises on the one hand its ritual character, and on the other places the pilgrim outside the normal flow of events, of life. Time is suspended in ritual, as it reproduces the 'first' time when it was performed, following the same, codified, steps.[27]

There is another element to the circumambulation of the sacred well as it is presented in many cases, which is the direction of the walk. The visitor walks *sone gaitis*, *deiseil*, i.e. sunwise. This direction is important as it is an auspicious one. It is for instance associated with the right hand, south, good luck, recovery from an illness or the prospect of finding a spouse in the divination rituals examined in the next chapter.[28] Sometimes, as in the case of a cure for cattle, the walk itself was said to heal the animals (see MacPhail 1895: 168). On the contrary, the anti-sunwise direction (*withershins* or *tuathal*) was deemed not only unlucky, but also dangerous. Its associations were with maleficent magic, and witches were said to use this unpropitious direction when performing their art. This binary set of oppositions (luck/misfortune; health/illness; etc.) sends us back to a universal division of the world, in which one way possesses positive values while its opposite is perceived as negative. The nature and values attached to the terms may vary according to cultures, but the system remains.[29] In Scotland, the southward direction, which followed the course of the sun was the positively valued one.[30] This will be verified in divination practices notably (see next chapter), and also in the belief that water taken from a south-running water was more efficacious.[31] As a part of the healing ritual, walking sunwise thus represented a supplementary measure towards the success of the healing ritual and the obtaining of a cure.

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[27] See e.g. Eliade 1979 (1958): 32; 397-398.

[28] It was, literally a way to bless people and animals, and to protect them from any kind of evil influences. Thus, a rather annoyed Martin recalls how he was thanked and blessed by a woman who walked around him deiseil: 'I had this ceremony paid me (when in the island of Islay) by a poor woman after I had given her alms: I desired her to let alone that compliment, for I did not care for it; but she insisted to make these three ordinary turns, and then prayed that God and MacCharmig, the patron saint of that island, might bless and prosper me in all my designs and affairs.' (1994 [1698]: 178)

[29] See the discussion on this subject in Part 1 of the next chapter.

[30] Dwelly (1988) quotes under *deiseal*: '*Deiseal air ga ni* – the sunward course (is the best) for everything'.

[31] Miller found that in almost one quarter of the cases of witchcraft that she studied, in which the use of water was mentioned at all, the accused gave the detail that they had used south-running water (2000: 281).

Once the circumambulation had been performed, the pilgrim would partake of the water from the well.

Use of water

'The waters are indeed healers; the waters drive away and cure all illnesses' (*Atharva Veda* vi: 91,3). Although this affirmation could hardly come from a more different background (in geographical, temporal, as well as cultural terms), the beliefs at work in Scotland seem to conform nevertheless to this – rather universal – view. Water from the healing well could be used internally, by drinking it, or externally, by washing one's afflicted body part(s), or in a combination of both. As an example of the latter, we remember how Thomas Patersone (quoted above) described how he first drank of the water, then he 'cust waltir over his heid', and then did his ablutions before leaving a piece of his shirt on a bush beside the well. The use of the water in its lustral capacity, at the well and in a context of illness, strongly recalls the ritual of baptism, in which the aspersion of holy water could be said to represent the healing ritual *par excellence*.[32]

It was not always possible for the patient to go in person to the well and, in that case, water could be fetched and brought back to him:

> [On the 13 June 1583] The said William Kay compeirit personallie and confessit he passit to Chrystis woll for one bairne of his awin, callit Johnne Kay, that was seik and that he tuik with him ane apprun string of the bairne and that he past about the woll and prayit to Chrystis Sonday to help his bairne and brocht hame the walter of the said woll and gaif to the bairne to drink and left the bairnis apprun string at the woll behind him. (Kirk [ed.] 1981: 135)

Acting on behalf of a third party seems to have been a common enough practice that could be performed by a relative, as above, or, as in the next quotation, left to someone who may have been a local healer. Although she denied it, Margaret Walker was cited in the records by her co-parishioners as the person who not only directed them to perform the ritual at the well at Airth (six miles north of Falkirk), but also could perform it for them and bring them back the water:[33]

> Ffebruary 24 [1657] – Compeired Bessie Thomson declarit schoe fetchit hom water from the said well and luit it not touch the ground in homcoming,

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[32] We also find the sprinkling of water as a way of ensuring good health especially to cattle and horses at certain calendar festivals (see Chapter 5).

[33] There is a Margaret Walker cited in Larner *et al.* (eds) 1977: 124, who appeared before the Privy Council on the 7th November 1661, but whose fate is unknown (case no. 1596).

> spoke not as sha went, said the belief at it, left money and ane napkin thair; and all was done at Margrat Walker's command.
> March 31 – Compeired Robert Ffuird who declairit yat Margrat Walker went to ye well of Airth to fetch water to Robert Cowie, and when schoe com thair, scho laid down money in Gods name, and ane napkin in Ro^{t} Cowie's name. (Kier 1835: 686)

This extract is interesting in more than one respect, giving as it does additional information about the prescriptions and prohibitions associated with the healing ritual. Notably, the indication that the water should not touch the ground on the way back home is now going to be discussed, while the apparently contradictory injunction of remaining silent and saying the 'belief', or creed, will be treated last, after we have examined the role of the pieces of cloth and offerings.

The particular element given by Bessie Thomson concerning the fact that she did not let the water touch the ground on her way home is of course to be understood as she did not let the *vessel* in which she carried the water touch the ground. This was important because of the sacred quality of the water. The joint consequence of the circumambulation of the well and of the interdiction of speech was an isolation of the pilgrim, a change in his nature which could allow him to partake of the water. But all these preparations and precautions would have been to no avail if the water was to lose its sacredness. For that is what would happen if it was allowed to touch the ground, even figuratively. The ground has not been consecrated by the pilgrim in the way the water has, and thus its profane nature would soil the water should they come into contact. To be exact, it would in fact remove the healing powers from the water, cancelling its power, neutralising it. This interdiction of bringing into contact a sacred substance, object, or even person with an unconsecrated environment is practised worldwide; it was for instance a feature of many African kingdoms in which the sovereign had to be carried as he was not allowed to touch the ground.[34] In Scotland, the prescription followed with care by Bessie Thomson and her co-villagers in 1657 was still known and applied much more recently, as this recipe for a toothache cure shows: 'A dog-fish being hooked is carefully preserved from touching anything that smells of *terra firma*, and while dangling in this unenviable position the spine or horn that projects from his back is cut out.' (MacPhail 1895: 168; italics

[34] A mirrored situation illustrating the reverse aspect of the sacred, akin to pollution, is to be found in the case of women after childbirth. They were 'forbidden' to go and visit their neighbours, lest their impure state should contaminate the other villagers. This lasted until they had been 'churched', that is until they had attended a religious service, and thereby been reintegrated within the community (see Bennett 1992: 8-9). The enclosure, the preservation of the sacred apart from the rest, whether because of the benefits expected from it, or because of its polluting nature, is, in any case, an absolute necessity.

in the text) This example involving a fish shows perhaps more clearly the underlying assumption at work, namely the necessity to keep things of a different nature separate. We have seen this was the case with the sacred and the profane, and it is also present here in the opposition water/earth; we will see that the same rule is very much at the core of the waterhorse legends in Section Three of the thesis.

Working from a cosmological perspective, Eliade described the organic relation between the patient and the healing water, a relation that would be damaged by the interference of, in our case, the everyday world in the form of the earth:

> 'New water', that is, the water in a new vase, not profaned by everyday use, contains all the values for creating and fostering life of the primeval Water. It heals, because in a sense it remakes creation. ... With the use of 'new' water in popular medicine, what is being sought is the magic regeneration of the patient by contact with primordial substance; the water absorbs his disease because of its power of taking to itself and dissolving all forms. (Eliade 1979 [1958]: 194)

We shall see now how the water was used, together with a piece of cloth, to 'absorb', and ultimately dissolve, the disease.

Leaving a cloot and an offering

The practice of leaving a piece of cloth near wells is what caused some Scottish wells to be called 'clootie wells', after the Scots word for a cloth. Some, as we have seen in the previous chapter, are obviously still in use at the beginning of the twenty-first century, an assertion verifiable by the ever-growing numbers of cloots that surround them. These 'rag wells', as they are called in English, are found in England and Wales as well as in Ireland and France, and elsewhere in the world.[35]

The rags were used in conjunction with the water to relieve the patient from his disease – I will come back to this belief below. This interpretation of their function, however, was not a favoured one by many folkorists at the turn of the twentieth century. Because the pieces of cloth were left, in the same manner as pins or other items were left, they were often thought to have the same nature, therefore fulfilling the same role. E. Sydney Hartland, for instance, published in *Foklore* in 1893 a paper on this subject, in which he gathered a very disparate, if extensive, set of customs – from Japan through France, Wales, Scotland, to the then Congo, to cite but a few – involving the leaving of a nail, a pin, a rag, etc. Judging them to be 'the outcome to

[35] For England, see Hope 1893: xxii; for Wales, Jones 1992 [1954]: 94; for Ireland, Carroll 1999: 33-35; and for France, Caulier 1990: 119. For a preliminary sample of the practice throughout the world, one can visit the website dedicated to healing wells given in Chapter 2.

equivalent practices', the solution to their meaning 'must fit them all' (p. 464). He found such a solution in the idea that all were, in the last analysis, a way to communicate with the deity:

> I venture to submit, then, that the practices of throwing pins into wells, of tying rags on bushes and trees, of driving nails into trees and stocks, and the analogous practices throughout the Old World, are to be interpreted as acts of ceremonial union with the spirit identified with well, with tree, or stock.

If, on the one hand, the idea of the 'ceremonial union' between the sacrifiant and the 'spirit' is not fundamentally wrong, the treatment of qualitatively different practices as being equivalent is, on the other hand, questionable. Indeed, in reaction to this perspective, John Rhŷs commented, I think very perceptively, that for his part, and as far as healing practices performed at wells were concerned, he was 'enclined to believe that the rag was regarded as the vehicle of the disease of which the ailing visitor to the well wished to be rid, and that the bead, button or coin deposited by him in the well, or in a receptacle near the well, formed alone the offering.' (1901: 358) In Scotland, this view was shared by James MacPherson who remarked that 'The offering of a pin and the attachment of a piece of clothing do not appear to be alternative offerings... Both were offered, the pin or coin, as a propitiation to the spirit of the well, the rag as the vehicle of transfer of the disease from which the patient suffered' (1929: 51-52). This was a notable break-through from the antiquarian literature – the most important written source for Scottish folklore – which tended to present the pieces of cloth as offerings, of the same symbolic quality as coins for example.[36]

In a more recent study, Jones's fine work on Welsh wells, the author writes that 'All we can say today is that we do not know the exact significance of the rag custom' (1992: 94), although he does enumerate four possible explanations: first, the rags are left to get rid of the disease; second, they are offerings; third, they are used as protections against the druids; and fourth, they symbolise the pilgrim's expiation. Even though Jones does not opt openly for any one of these, the cases that he presents clearly connect with the first since they stress the washing of the suffering part of the body with a rag that is then either hung on a bush or hidden underneath a stone (p. 95). In these cases, namely when they were used in healing rituals, it seems to me that offerings and rags had different symbolic natures, and that they were complementary and both necessary to secure a good result.

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[36] See e. g. Fraser 1878: 10; Henderson 1911: 193; MacGregor 1937: 77; MacKinlay 1893: 82.

The process of leaving of a rag can be analysed as a ritual based on a sympathetic and contagious magic pattern.[37] The contagious aspect manifests itself in the belief that leaving a garment that had been in contact both with the water and the suffering body part was the equivalent of leaving the illness behind oneself, literally; the water washed the disease away on the cloth. As for the sympathetic side, it is illustrated in the analogy between the disintegration of the rag and the fading of the disease.[38] It was therefore considered very dangerous to touch these rags once they were hung on the bushes, for it would have meant transferring the illness from them to one's body.[39] An interesting form of the practice was observed in France, at Saint-Germain-des-Hayes, where the pilgrim would bring a ribbon and, after having dipped it in the well, would cut it in two: one half would be tied to the statue of the saint, while the other would be pinned on his coat. As Caulier analysed it, 'the pilgrim gives his or her disease to the saint and takes back the cure',[40] a cure that is made possible through the medium of water (my translation).

We saw above, in the extract from the records of Falkirk, that the distinction between the respective roles of the cloth and the offering was very clear in the mind of the people who sought their health at the well of Airth, as it was declared that Margaret Walker had left some money 'in Gods name', and a napkin 'in Robert Cowie's name'. The money left by Margaret Walker was thus her offering, on behalf of Robert Cowie, to obtain the cure for which she had gone to the well. The balance of power that was discussed in the first part of the chapter is here illustrated: the money, left in advance of the cure, is not merely gratulatory;[41] it is also a way to

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[37] In the Irish Catholic context, Michael Carroll has presented the leaving of a piece of clothing that had been in contact with the suffering body as a form of ' "detachment" from physical and spiritual ailments' (1999: 34).

[38] The analogy works at the level of the principle; it is not supposed to work at a real-time level. Comparing this to the modern practice of leaving synthetic garments at a clootie well, we can see how the general custom has evolved; on the one hand, this sympathetic aspect of the belief has clearly been forgotten – synthetic fabric is not supposed to dissolve – and on the other hand, the association of the disease and the rag are still relevant to the people who still refuse to touch them (see note below, and see also the previous chapter for more recent examples).

[39] 'The leaving a bit of rag was equivalent to leaving behind the trouble, and to take away this rag was to take upon one's self the trouble of the person who hung it there.' (Polson 1926: 144)

[40] 'le pèlerin donne son mal au saint et remporte la guérison' (Caulier 1990: 119). An interesting variant on this principle was recorded in Wales by Rh s in 1893, to whom an 'illiterate servant' described how 'a man with a wound, by which he explained to mean a cut, would go and stand in the well within the wall, and there he would untie the rag that had been used to tie up the wound and would wash the wound with it: then he would tie up the wound with a fresh rag and hang the old one on the tree.' (1901: 355)

[41] I am using this adjective in the second meaning given in the *OED*: 'Expressing gratitude or thanks; made as a thankoffering. In theological language, specially applied to sacrifices 'of thanksgiving' as opposed to propitiatory sacrifices'.

secure a positive response, a payment in advance in a sort of contract that the deity, here God, is expected to respect.

It was not always money that was left, as some people simply could not afford to leave coins in a well, although the principle was respected. In 1895, Peter MacDonald who worked as a collector of folklore for Robert C. Maclagan,[42] sent him a description of the practices associated with a well called *Tobar Craobh fear fil na banadh*, which he obtained from an old woman (no date, name or place given).[43] The woman told MacDonald that this well was reknowned for its ability to cure different kinds of ailments, as long as the patient left something, no matter what:

> everyone who drank out of it was to leave something in the well. Sometimes silver and copper coins would be dropped in it, and if they were too poor to leave any money, they left something else. It was cleared at one time, when there were found pins, buttons, beads, bits of strings, et cetera, some pieces of clothes and coins. It was a sin for any one to drink out of it without leaving anything... (Maclagan Mss: 1970)

Indeed, two centuries before, Martin had already noted that what was left was considered but a 'small token'.[44] The emphasis was on the action of giving something to the well or its associated entity; neglecting this tacit arrangement could therefore be considered a breach of the contract between the consultant and the spirit, and this could bring tragic consequences. The same informant told MacDonald that if people did not leave anything, 'it was believed that the old spirit guarding the well would be after that person, for it was thought that there was a constant watcher of the well hidden from sight until they tried to go off without leaving the toll, or offering, in the well.'

Whereas beads, buttons, and coins seem to have been straightforward offerings cast into the water, an ambiguity exists concerning the metallic objects such as pins, needles, and nails that were also found in and around wells. For instance, it is now impossible to tell whether nails driven into a tree were meant to be an offering,[45] or whether they were a metaphor for the disease, planted directly into the wood, image

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[42] See below in Chapter 6 for more information on Maclagan's collection.

[43] In answer to a query from Maclagan about the meaning of the name of the well, MacDonald replied that 'It is said that the name means the "well on the lip of the hill". That the present name is from *Tobar Craobh bile'n na beinnadh*'. (Maclagan Mss: 2000)

[44] 'It is common with sick people to make a vow to come to the well, and after drinking, they make a tour sunways round it, then leave an offering of some small token, such as a pin, needle, farthing, or the like' (Martin 1994 [1698]: 274).

[45] Frazer describes a fertility custom among gypsies of Transylvania and Romania during which three nails that 'have lain for three days and nights in water' are knocked into a tree, then pulled out, and finally flung 'into a running stream to propitiate the water-spirits' (1935: part I, vol. 2, 75-76).

of the disease being left behind,[46] or an aid to securing the rag, thus emphasising the idea of getting rid of the disease.[47] Sir J. G. Frazer had recognised the problem of interpretation and commented thus:

> [I]t would seem that we must distinguish at least two uses of nails or pins in their application to spirits and spiritual influences. In one set of cases the nails act as corks or bungs to bottle up and imprison a troublesome spirit; in the other set of cases they act as spurs or goads to refresh his memory and stimulate his activity. (1935, part 6: 71)

In fact, the specific case of pins seems to be more complicated than Frazer had envisaged, as they were also used in divination practices in conjunction with water, and sometimes they were also instrumental in the casting of a curse. Hence their symbolism is also very varied. They carry, for instance, values attached to femininity and fertility. Certainly, the association of pins with fertility is well-attested, for instance in Scotland, where a marriage custom was recorded in Applecross at the end of the nineteenth century, involving the gift of 'two or three pins', given by the bride the day after her wedding, to 'her most intimate female friends'. The pins thus given 'are supposed to secure good luck to such as receive them.' (Maclagan Mss: 8052) Pins are also found in French customs and beliefs regarding marriage, which led the social anthropologist Yvonne Verdier to consider them as complex objects, not only because of their dual quality of tying together and of defending against, but also because they are very strong emblems of girls of an age to be married (Verdier 1979: 241):

> Tying together the parts of her dress, from puberty onwards, symbolising the cost of her outfits, codifying her love relationships, denoting the 'most virtuous', the 'girliest', the pin seems to be the girl's instrument *par excellence*, her attribute. (my translation)[48]

This symbolic link with girls and marriage made pins the obvious candidate to be used in divination practices regarding marriage, but they were also used in health predictions – both will be treated in the next chapter.

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[46] See Caulier (1990: 119) who describes such a case in France.

[47] There was a charm used in Shetland against toothache, the rhythm of which conveys well the forceful transferring of the ailment to outside the body – here into a stone: 'A Finn came ow'r from Norraway / Fir to pit toot'ache away - / Oot o' da flesh an' oot o' da bane / Oot o' da sinew an' oot o' da skane / Oot o' da skane an' into da stane / An' dere may du remain! / An' dere may du remain!! / An' dere may du remain!!!' (MacKenzie 1895: p. 59).

[48] 'Attachant les pièces de son costume à partir de la puberté, symbolisant ses dépenses en matière de toilette, codifiant ses rapports amoureux avec les garçons, désignant la plus "sage" d'entre elles, la plus "jeune fille", l'épingle semble être l'instrument par excellence de la jeune fille, son attribut'.

Contrasting with this benevolent use of pins, a curse could be cast against someone by throwing a pin into the water and saying the name of the person, as is documented for Wales at a well dedicated to St Elian.[49]

Yet another usage comes from Brittany, where pins were left in holy wells because it was believed that the dead gathered at night around these wells, and that '[t]hese pins are used, during the long, cold winter nights, to pin together the tatters of the shroud, their last and only garment' (Perrin 1999: 76; my translation).[50]

Taking into account all these possible explanations for leaving a pin in a well, one can see how difficult it is to assign a meaning to material evidence when the context has disappeared; on finding an old pin in a well, how can we tell what the person who left it meant to achieve? The only definite conclusion one can draw from their presence is that someone, at some point, made a request and came to a well to obtain satisfaction. This in itself is quite important when one considers that if people had left only perishable goods in the form of offerings of food and flowers, there would be even less evidence of the pilgrimages to well. Unless, of course, a witness happened to pass by the well shortly after this kind of offering was made: 'When I visited [Maddern Well, Cornwall] last week, I found in it a polianthus and some article of an infant's dress, which showed that votaries had been there', wrote one of its readers to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1819 (Gomme [ed.] 1884: 147). Only recently in Wales, a remote well was found with flowers as well as white quartz stones deposited beside it (Kennedy 1999: 10).

Besides the circling of the well, the ablutions and sometimes the taking home of the water, the leaving of a cloot and of an offering, a last requirement still needed to be fulfilled to secure the cure desired; all the different parts of the ritual needed to be performed in silence. We shall now turn to this aspect of the ceremonial.

Silence ...

The first comment to make in relation to the prescription of silence is one concerning its importance. Most of the time, in our society, silence is considered as the absence of words, or of noise, and, consequently, silence is often imbued with connotations of emptiness, of lack. In polarised terms, a positive value is attributed to words, while silence is viewed as the opposite, and is therefore seen in negative terms. However, from the point of view of the ritual, these parameters do not apply, since silence does have an important role to play. As there are different sorts of

[49] See Rhŷs 1901, vol. 1: 357; 395-397; Jones 1992 [1954]: 117-123.

[50] 'Ces épingles, dans les longues et froides nuits d'hiver, leur servent à rattacher les lambeaux du suaire, leur dernier et unique vêtement.' This edition presents engravings by Olivier Perrin (born 1761), accompanied by a text by Alexandre Bouet.

speech, as we shall see below when discussing charms, there are similarly different kinds of silence – the distinction just mentioned between silence in the context of ritual and in a social situation can serve to illustrate this point. Furthermore, even in the single context of a sacred ceremony, silence can have different functions.

The first function, which I will call communicative, relates to the vertical axis of communication established between the pilgrim and the deity involved. Working with material from the Vedic cult, Louis Renou remarked that different sorts of silence existed, even within the ritual. One of them, which he calls '*formulaire*', or formulaic, acts as a replacement for words. He noted the link between silence, sacrifice, and the god Prajāpati, who presides over sacrifices. Thus, remaining silent is a way to propitiate Prajāpati, who 'is the inexpressible', to appropriate the god for oneself (1949: 14). Drawing on the ancient Indian texts, Renou presents formulaic silence as 'the eye and root of sacrifice', in so far as 'it makes the sacrifice visible (as though speech concealed it)'. [51] Silence encompasses the ritual and prolongs its efficacy indefinitely. We also find the concept of the ineffable god in Judeo-Christian tradition, in which praying in silence is the least imperfect way to give homage to God, as the unicity of His essence 'baffles the multiplying operations of language: the only true language to speak to God, and of God, is silence.'(Montiglio 2000: 9) We can observe in both instances, although they come from very different cultural contexts, how silence exalts the prayer, or the sacrifice, to help it reach the deity invoked. The performative power of words should also be at the back of our minds when dealing with the Christian culture; silence works in opposition to the Word in that what it creates remains invisible, and unspeakable – through it is created one's connection with the divine. This vertical link that one establishes with the deity through silence exists mutually with another, silent, relation – or non-relation as it were – which constitutes the second function of silence.

This second function acts for its part on a horizontal axis, orientated between the pilgrim at one end, and 'the world', or the mundane, at the opposite end. This function I will call reflexive; the pilgrim's attention is turned inward and his attitude should preclude any communications of a profane order. This point is well illustrated in the Falkirk records; all the accused seemed to make the point that they had not spoken on their way, a detail that did not escape the members of the Session, and figures in their interrogation:

> March 10 [1657]. Compeared Margrat Forsyth being demandit if scho went to the well of Airth, to fetch water thairfrom, spok not by ye [w]aye, luit it

[51] 'Le silence "formulaire" a des vertus singulières: il est l'œil et la racine du sacrifice…; il rend le sacrifice visible (comme si la parole le dissimulait)' (Renou 1949: 14).

> not touch ye ground in homcoming? if scho said ye belief? left money and ane napkin at it? Answered affirmatively in every poynt... (Kier 1835: 686)

Over three centuries later, Caulier observed in France that folk healers also respected this obligation of remaining silent during the performance of the ritual. Interestingly, this manner of placing oneself outside of the world adopted by the professional healers in a village of the Limousin region was recognised and respected by the other villagers: 'it's so that she can be better concentrated in her prayers', explained a woman of the same village to the author (Caulier 1990: 101; my translation).[52] The prayers alluded to form a part of the healing ritual that is performed on behalf of the sick person, and do not appear to be placed under the same injunction. Renou found exactly the same kind of 'selective' silence, recognised in the Vedic texts and called *vāgyamana*; this type of silence does not extend to the recitation of the sacred formulas, but 'applies to the "profane" speech that the celebrant pronounces, or could pronounce, consciously or inadvertently' (1949: 15; my translation).[53] In view of these approaches, what we read in the Falkirk records, about the visitors to Airth well who could recall being silent yet at the same time admitted to having said 'ye belief' during the ritual, does not seem so paradoxical any longer.

Within the reflexive attitude, a further dimension is that of the silence taken as a mark of impurity. Silvia Montiglio has shown very clearly how, in the Ancient Greek literature, an interdiction of speaking and being spoken to was inflicted upon the characters who had become impure, often through murder or the transgression of a taboo. This interdiction had the two-fold purpose of protecting others from the criminal's polluted, and thus polluting, speech; and it also placed the criminal outside society in a state of marginality, and for a certain period of time. In Montiglio's words: 'This injunction of silence, which denies the culprit a social existence, only terminates after he has undergone a purificatory ritual to be integrated again into the order that he has compromised.' (2000: 18) Although we are dealing here with disease, and not crime, we can see how this analysis can be helpful to decode the ritual silence of healing ceremonies. Disease represents a state of impurity, which does place the patient at the margins of his working, healthy – at least relatively healthy – community. If he is not exactly ostracised by the law or the gods as in the Greek context, the sufferer exists nonetheless in a restricted capacity, of which silence is the sign. At the same time, keeping silent represents the first step towards

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[52] 'C'est pour mieux qu'elle se concentre dans ses prières'.

[53] '[Le *vāgyamana* s'applique] aux paroles "profanes" que l'officiant prononce ou qu'il pourrait prononcer, consciemment ou par inadvertance'.

healing – and thence the re-gaining of his wholeness together with his reinstatement within society that will ensue from the ritual.

The two functions, communicative and reflexive, are inter-dependent; not because they cannot exist separately – which they can – but because, in the context of a healing ritual, the one would be pointless without the other. In our Scottish context, they certainly both play a role in the visits to healing wells. I would argue that the communicative function of silence could be associated with the circumambulation, as both serve to establish the basis of the sacrificial ritual that is about to follow. The reflexive function intervenes both before and after the ritual has taken place, carrying within it the distinction between the profane world and words that are to be rejected, and the sacred prayers – recitations, charms, incantations – that form another part of the ritual. Before we turn our attention to charms, however, another angle of the 'silence issue' has to be explored. We have approached so far the whole experience of being silent from the participants' perspective, within the frame of the ritual; however, we know from the Falkirk records that the ecclesiastical authorities were aware of the role of silence. What we shall now examine is how it was perceived from their viewpoint.

A few years before the visitors to the well at Airth were summoned, Thomas Jackson witnessed in England the following scene:

> This upon mine owne knowledge, and observation I can relate; of two, sent more than a mile, after the sun-setting, to fetch south-running water, with a strict injunction, not to salute any either going or coming, no not their dearest friends, if they should chance to meet them (as by chance they did). Such silence had well beseemed them in Gods Temple; but in this case was the sacrifice of fooles, an offering up of their tongues and lips unto the service of Devills... (1625: 179-180)

The instructions regarding the south-running water and the moment at which the water had to be fetched, 'after the sun-setting', both refer to the liminal aspects of the custom that will be dealt with in the next chapter. What is of interest to us here, however, lies with the judgment that the silence observed by the two persons thus sent, constituted an offering 'unto the service of Devills'. It is doubtful that the people involved, for their part, considered their action in those terms. On the contrary, in the matter of silence as in the matter of numerous charms, people relied on the teachings of the Bible, which they transferred and applied to situations occurring in their lives. For instance, we can read in 2 Kings 4.29 how the prophet Elisha entrusted his servant Gehazi with his staff, to perform a cure on his behalf:

> Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child.[54]

Silence is used in this passage as the container of the sacred – in the form here of Elisha's staff.

The similitude between Jackson's recollection and the passage from the Bible is a good example of the demonologists' view that only a certain 'agency' was able to alter the nature of people and objects, namely the Devil (see above, Part 2, the quotation from Clark). By taking the Bible's contents literally and, above all, by crediting these contents with actual efficacy, people attributed power to 'things' or concepts that did not normally have any. This was, for the theologians of the Reformed Church, the proof of the intervention of the Devil.

... and the power of words

From this perspective, it is not surprising that the healing rituals as they were described for instance in the Kirk Records, by the performers themselves, should represent a deviant interpretation of the Scriptures. Consequently, the use of words, recited and/or written down to constitute a material charm, was considered a magic practice, sometimes associated with witchcraft. From a cosmological point of view, using words to perform a cure, that is to change someone's sickness into health, or making someone 'whole' again, bears strong affinities with the demiurgic act of God, whose speech created the world: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1.1). It was not, therefore, so much the potency of words that the Kirk questioned, as the assumption underlying their use by a human being. According to the demonologists' logic, a folk healer who utilised speech to create or instigate the process of healing would be assuming God's place, which could only have been suggested to him or her by the Devil.[55]

The question as to whether these cosmological considerations had any bearings on the patients' point of view may never be answered; the interesting factor here is that on both sides of the official religion, charms and incantations were taken seriously – in the last analysis, everyone shared the same worldview, which, as we saw earlier, made it difficult for the authorities to impose their interpretation of it.

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[54] This passage was referred to by the very people who went silently to fetch water, as observed by Jackson, as a justification of their attitude when it was objected to by the Church authorities (Jackson 1625: 180).

[55] This is probably where the distinction mentioned earlier between invocations and incantations applied, to differentiate between prayers, that is appeals to God and his saints, and charms more linked to the manipulation of the nature of certain objects.

Incidentally, the intrinsic power of words made them dangerous, especially to those who did not possess knowledge, those who were not 'cunning' men and women. In the healing context, using words improperly might at best neutralise the healing power of water, and at worst might harm instead of heal.[56] From these two associated notions of power and danger stem some characteristics of the operation of charming, as we shall now see.

It was indeed considered dangerous to tell the charms to anyone other than the person who was seeking the cure. Thus, a person who remained anonymous, commented that a charm said in cases of bleeding had to be repeated but not 'aloud, nor in the presence of any one except the patient'. It was also the case for another charm used to heal burns, and this had to 'be repeated by a wise one and also in private' ('Orkney Charms' 1854: 221-222). In that respect, the use of charms was well controlled, and, as it remained the privilege of a few, the risks that accompanied it were thereby reduced.[57]

The restriction of knowledge to a small number of persons within a certain area would have meant that these individuals were likely to have a reputation for healing or charming this or that ailment.[58] They had at their disposal different types of charm, that I shall divide into two categories. On the one hand there were charms involving the use of objects such as stones, silver coins, iron, vegetation, etc.; and, on the other hand, charms involving the use of words. Among those, there were the spoken charms and the written ones. A written charm would be worn in contact with the skin to be effective, and should not be opened and read by anyone after the healer had sealed it, as this would have taken away its efficacy. There is an example of a spoken charm in the Dunblane Kirk-Session Records ('Dunblane' 1890: 119-20), which gives an idea of what was involved in terms of beliefs, and also of what could be admitted before a Kirk session. In this case, a woman named Cathrine McGregor was summoned on the 24th February 1659 before the session, because she was denounced to the session for performing a healing ritual involving water from a well and a charm, to heal a woman in Stirling. It was reported to the session 'that sche

[56] Early Greek writers such as Hippolytus and Pliny mention that one of the rules for the gathering of certain plants used in the performance of sacred ceremonies, was that a total silence was to be observed. This was to avoid any risk of maledictions, which would soil the plant and destroy its properties (see Delatte 1938: 61-63).

[57] Charms formed only a part of the whole healing process, which was centred on one particular individual at a certain time; if circulated outwith these circumstances, the assumption was that the charm could harm. At a very practical level, secrecy also meant a relative assurance of security for the healer whose acts were considered not only suspicious but also illegal by the Church authorities.

[58] As Christina Larner has usefully summarised: first, the disease was perceived as a foreign body that could be removed; second, words have power over disease; third, the efficacy of the formula depends on the healer's powers (1981: 139; she presents the observations made for England by K. Thomas [1971: 185]).

[had] useth lives[59] and charmes carying of water out of ye superstitious well at Cullines'. McGregor appeared before the session on the 3rd of March, and although she denied 'yat she did wash ye woman in Stirling with ye water or yat sche did sprinkle her with it', she confessed 'yat sche did cast ye fairne wispe [wisp of fern] yat stopped ye stope ['wooden vessel generally used to carry water from a well' – *SND*] into ye firre'.[60] She also repeated the charm she said while doing that:

> Sanct Jone lay in ye mouth of a lyon
> And he forgot himselfe to saine [bless]
> And something came to him with a dreime.
> Will yat it burn him be stake and stane
> Will it burnt him to the bane
> For all ye illes yat ever may be
> Let it never byde with the
> But in ye aire and into ye flame
> And let it never come againe to the.
> Ryse up mother Marie for deir jesus sake
> And charm this man with yor ten fingeres
> With yor great gold ringes
> For blood and melt for shotes and grippe
> For all ye illes that ever may be
> Let it never come againe to the
> But into ye aire and into ye flame
> And let it never come againe to the.

It may be that Cathrine McGregor repeated the charm she had used in order to prove to the session that she was not practising witchcraft. Owen Davies has shown (1998: 46) that, although the ecclesiastical authorities regarded them as prohibited superstitions, on the popular side, 'charms were considered to be legitimate Christian prayers and blessings for healing purposes'; McGregor's confession appears to be corroborating this view.[61]

From the charm quoted above, we may infer that the woman suffered from burns, upon which the charm was supposed to act sympathetically – as we saw earlier, the leaving of a rag worked according to the same principle. But apart from the external

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[59] The word 'lives' was probably written instead of 'libes', as indicated in *DOST*, which gives the meaning of 'a potion, drug, simple, and in compounds'.

[60] This is perhaps so as not to be accused of having kept Catholic practices, as the ablutory and sprinkling were very much part of the Catholic ritual. By contrast, throwing plants in the fire could be seen as a 'mere' superstitious practice.

[61] Unfortunately, the records do not report what happened to Cathrine McGregor, but I found that a woman of the same name was summoned before the session for adultery on the 21st of April, 1662, and mentioned several times after that. Furthermore, there is no entry under that name in the *Source-Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (Larner *et al.* 1977) which lists the accusations and trials of witches in Scotland. All of this would tend to indicate that she did not 'suffer the pane of deith' as an idolator following her accusation (see *supra* the *Act of Parliament*).

signs of the ritual, sometimes the nature of the language used in charms, either spoken or written, is in itself an indication of the perception of disease and its cure. Often, the healer would use a language that could not be understood by the patient. This unintelligible tongue could be invented, or real – a vernacular form of Latin could for instance be used.[62] The emphasis was on the strangeness of the words employed. In a system that viewed disease as a *foreign* body, it should not come as a surprise. As something alien, that came from outside forces, illness could be cured with a remedy coming from an alien and outside source. Thus charms spoken or written in alien languages fulfilled this double requirement: alien was the language, and they operated from the outside of the body – as opposed to an ingested remedy for instance. There is more. This conception also entailed that the disease could be expelled from the body, and this brings us back to the concept of the transference of evil from one's body to something or someone else. We saw that such was the function of rags suspended on bushes during healing rituals. However, the transference of the disease could be obtained through the use of water and charm, as we shall see in the following extract from Orkney.

> The inconvenience arising from such a superstitious regard paid to the Gospel, is well illustrated in a case that came, in the year 1708, before the ministers and elders in Orkney, where notions similar to those of Shetland prevailed. William Stensgar of Southside, being afflicted with a pain in his limbs, probably rheumatic, which confined him to his bed, Catharine Taylor, a poor cripple beggar woman, in repute as a charmer, was sent for to tell out the pain. She came to the man about an hour before sunrise, and by her directions he followed her to a gateway named a *slap* or *grind*; the wife accompanying him with a *stoup* of water.[63] Here the sybil halted; the patient laid bare his knee, and she touched it with her hands, repeating at the same time the following words: 'As I was going by the way, I met the Lord Jesus Christ in the likeness of another man; he asked me what tidings I had to tell. I said I had no tidings to tell, but I am full of pains, and I can neither gang or stand. Thou shalt go to the holy kirk, and thou shalt gang it round about, and then sit down upon thy knees and say thy prayers to the Lord, and then thou shalt be as heal as the hour when Christ was born.' After this raving nonsense, which by her confession she had learned when a child from an old woman, she applied to the knee the lawful charm of the Gospel, by repeating over it the twenty-third Psalm, upon which the evil spirit that caused the disease was *telled out*, and fairly transferred to the stoup of water. She then emptied the vessel on the slap, with the malevolent intention that the disease, (or, to speak more correctly, the demon that induced it), should take possession of the first unlucky wight that might pass the stile;

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[62] Mare Kõiva thus noted in Estonia that 'the so-called foreign-language incantations are [held to be] effective in healing' and that 'foreigners are better healers' (1999: 112).

[63] See gloss for 'stoppe' on previous page.

> and when a new habitation was thus secured for the evil spirit, the possibility of the invalid experiencing a return of the complaint would be completely obviated. (Hibbert 1822: 582-583)[64]

The process of transference of the illness is very clearly illustrated here, together with the form of the charm, the walking around the church and the moment at which the ritual took place, all essential elements in the success of the cure. The 'telling out' of the pain and the evil spirit who had caused it could indicate that the patient believed he had been *forespoken*, that is to say, someone had cast a curse on him. Literally, as the disease had been talked into the patient, similarly it could be 'telled out'.

Conclusion

As we have just seen, healing rituals, performed at wells or at home, in person or by a healer, constituted complex operations, and filled a recognised function in a belief system just as complex. Their obvious and primary purpose is certainly associated with the curing of men's various ailments. But by going to a well to obtain a cure, the visitors did more than seek their health; they reasserted their place in the world through a ritual presenting all the characteristics of sacrifice. By leaving a rag and an offering, the pilgrim willed the supernatural, which had 'sent' the disease in the first place, into taking it back. Acknowledging that the natural state of the world had been disturbed, with his illness as a result, man could remedy the situation through the ceremonial, thus readjusting the balance of powers. This is an important point, I believe, if we are to understand the concepts and beliefs underlying the ritual. Part of it was expiatory, especially in a Catholic context, where one had to atone for one's sins – the function of pilgrimage *par excellence*, illustrated by Lady Aboyne's example. There also were gratulatory and propitiatory elements to it, for one undoubtedly needed to conciliate the entity involved. There was, moreover, a fourth dimension to the ritual, which reflected a certain cosmological perspective. By performing the sort of sacrificial ritual that we have examined in this chapter, man was in fact preempting and securing an answer from the Otherworld, whatever this might be – favourable or not.

This exchange between man and the supernatural was made possible through diverse means; charms represented one of the ways to establish contact, and water certainly acted as a 'messenger' between the two worlds. Men left offerings in it to

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[64] The twenty-third psalm ends thus: 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever'.

reach the supernatural powers, which responded, by giving healing properties to the water.

In the following Section, and especially in the next chapter, we will see how water acted as a medium to communicate with the Otherworld in other circumstances besides healing rituals.

Section Two

PASSAGES TO THE OTHERWORLD

CHAPTER 4

LIMINALITY, CENTRE, AND BOUNDARIES

Introduction

Having examined in the previous section the ethnographic material regarding the pilgrimages to healing wells in Scotland – their historical background and the rituals taking place at wells – I am now going to discuss the broader, cosmological context of which they were a part, and to some extent a manifestation. The two chapters composing this second section of the thesis both deal with places, moments, creatures, and procedures, through which human beings and the Otherworld can get in contact with each other. Indeed, connections with the Supernatural could be actively sought, either to obtain answers about the future, or to ensure the protection and benediction from the supernatural forces – Christian or non-Christian – upon one's health, crops, cattle, that is to say areas generally linked to fertility and abundance.

In this chapter, we are going to try to establish the characteristics that make water such an ideal passageway to the Otherworld in the Scottish context. The notion of water as a link between our world and another one is familiar and remarkably widespread; it is found, to cite but a few examples, from the Egyptian symbolic imagery – the sacred boat taking the sun across the night to rise anew in the morning – to the Greek boatman Charon, ferrying the dead across the River Styx, even to South America where certain tribes consider water as 'the abodes of the souls', and use it as the last resting place of their dead.[1] As we can see, this association of water with the Otherworld includes and encompasses at the same time another relation, namely that of water with death, or perhaps more exactly, with the dead. The liminal quality of water is unquestionably linked to this relation with the dead, whether it is derived from it or is at its root.

Working with the notion of water as a passage, one cannot avoid broaching the subject of thresholds, margins, boundaries – in a word, liminality. The first part of the chapter will deal with these issues, including in the discussion an element not *a priori* associated with boundaries, namely the centre. Indeed, both aspects,

[1] Lévi-Strauss thus commented that, for the South-American Bororo living in the marsh area of the Pantanal, 'Water and death are ... always connected in native thought. In order to procure the one, it is necessary to undergo the other' (1994: 192).

marginality and centrality, can be found in the qualities and functions attributed to water, whether in connection with time or with space. We will be able to see how the dual character of water is illustrated not only in beliefs and practices, but also in literary ballads and mythological texts. Having thus established the reasons why water can link the supernatural and real worlds, we will examine in the second and third parts of this chapter the modalities of exchange between the two. This will lead us to discuss first the uses of water in customs that were performed as and when there was a need for them, that is occasional practices such as healing and certain divinatory rituals. We will then look at two particular moments in the year, the start of the summer and of the winter seasons (in May and November respectively), which also involved, among other sorts of customs, divination rites. All the rituals presented here rely on certain conception of time, space, centre and boundaries, which we shall now examine.

Part 1 – Centres and boundaries

Although a certain relation to space has been developed in the previous chapters as far as pilgrimages to, and healing practices at, wells were concerned, what we are going to focus on here, is the cosmological aspect of water, notably its role as *axis mundi*. In this respect, the notion of liminality and margins will need to be looked at as much in terms of centre, as in terms of threshold and borders. Susan Gillespie captured well what is at stake behind the apparent ambiguity of this mode of reasoning:

> [B]oundary figures are by definition on the edge, but because they exist in limbo between opposed categories, they are obviously at the center of the greater phenomenon that includes those categories. Thus to be at the edge is simultaneously to be at the center. (1989: 163)

Indeed, we find this dichotomy of centre-margins, seemingly inherent to the nature of boundaries, clearly reflected in the temporal prescriptions regarding the moment or period at which magic practices had to be performed in order to ensure their efficacy. Thus, four moments were distinguished during a twenty-four hour day, which illustrate both terms. On the one hand, *mid*-day and *mid*-night convey, semantically and in the popular psyche, the notion that the centre of the day and/or of the night represent a kind of liminal ideal – especially midnight. On the other hand, however, we also have very strong indications that highly rated moments were just

before sunrise and after sunset, when the sun is not visible yet there is light – we saw some examples in the last chapter – moments which occur at the start and at the end of the day; in other words these relate to extremities, and therefore to margins.[2] If the case of the days is relatively straightforward, at least semantically, in so far as the identification of the centre and of the beginning/end are concerned, the situation becomes more complex when we move to consider a bigger time-frame. This is why we need, at this point, to try defining what constitutes a centre, and what are its relations to what surrounds it – both temporarily and spatially.

As Emily Lyle has proposed on different occasions (see 1990: 86-91 and 1991), there are different sorts of temporal centres. The 'deictic' centre relates to the relative position of an individual; it is the 'now' of this individual, and as it always exists in relation to this person, it is by definition always changing with him or her. Contrasting with the deictic centre is the 'true' centre, which corresponds to a more external experience of time, and is therefore separate from the individual's centre. One of the characteristics of the true centre is that it is preceded and followed by periods of equal lengths, whereas there can be no such implication with the deictic centre (1991: 29).[3] She then goes further in defining true centres by distinguishing between 'symbolic' centres and 'calendar' ones. A good example to illustrate each of these, which moreover is of direct interest to us here, is that of the Celtic year divided in two equal halves between Beltane and Samain. Fundamentally, both could correspond to the centre of the year, and in a sense each does, although at different levels. To be more exact, each can be considered the beginning/end of the year, implying that the other one is the centre. At the calendar level, it is usually agreed that the year starts in November with the winter half, and consequently, May Day becomes the centre of the year (see Rees 1995 [1961]: 85-86). However, at the symbolic level, Samain seems to have more affinities with the centre, notably in the relations it bears to both marriage and death – relations that will be illustrated by the Scottish divinatory practices examined in Part 3 of the chapter.[4] The corollary of such a dual nature at one of the two dividing points of the year is that it should be mirrored at its opposite point. And indeed, although Beltane corresponds to the

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[2] This fourfold division of the day comes out very clearly in Anna Brzozowska-Krajka's book on Polish folklore, which is organised around them (1998).

[3] An instance of a true centre could be the incidence of the full moon, in the middle of the lunar month; while the deictic centre could be seen as the going through life of a person: every moment is a 'now' point, but without any symmetrical relation either to the ones that have happened until this 'now', or to these that are going to follow.

[4] See Lyle (1990: 84) for a demonstration as to how these characteristics came to be related to Samhain.

calendar centre of the year, it is nonetheless associated with the renewal of life through the re-birth of Nature, and also to the death of winter – features that are characteristic of its symbolic beginning/end function. So, what we have in the festival days of Samhain and Beltane is effectively the merging of the centre with the boundaries, the recognition of a dual cosmological situation. That these two days should be considered liminal seems then only logical, and this should account for the performing of certain rituals at these particular times of the year. The nature of the relation between the ritual and the time of the ritual is explored in Part 2, in a discussion involving the prescribed moment in any day, as opposed to a festival day. This is because the quarter days (although I have dealt with only two of them here, the demonstration should be valid for the other two quarter days, Lugnasa on the first of August, and Imbolc, on the first of February) and the designated moments for carrying out the ritual share the same dual structure combining the centre with extremities.

However important the moment of the day or of the year, time can hardly be considered without taking the spatial element into account – at least when we are dealing with rites as preoccupied with place as they are with time. In our case, the nature of the place is more important than its cartographic location, as what is mostly relevant is the presence of water.

As an example of the indissociable nature of centre and boundaries, I am now going to turn to the place occupied by water in real, territorial boundaries.

> Interest in boundaries is, of course, a universal phenomenon to prevent the encroachment of neighbouring peoples. In this sense boundaries can be seen as mechanisms that regulate contact between different communities. They formed a neutral ground, which offered a zone where political and commercial arrangements might be effected. (Sjöblom 1994: 161)

In their capacity of place of contact between different and possibly antagonistic peoples, boundaries and the band of land on each side of them – the no-man's land – often combined the function of meeting place, as Tom Sjöblom proposes, with that of sanctuary, that is a place with religious, sacred connotations, and that of girth, which denotes a more political aspect.[5] Indeed, as we learn from Pádraig Ó Riain's seminal article on boundaries and their associations in Ireland, there as well as in Wales, Cornwall, and some parts of Brittany, the location of churches is in relatively remote areas within their parish, a peculiarity which he suggests 'derives directly from the

[5] For a detailed discussion of the tradition of girth in Scotland until the Reformation, see Hector MacQueen 2001.

tendency to locate churches on the boundaries of territorial units' (1972: 19). The boundaries could and would have been major landscape features, and water landmarks such as rivers, lakes, or springs – as well as others such as trees, rocks, etc. – are listed in early Irish law texts (p. 17).

The major point made by Ó Riain is, I think, that in Early Irish society, boundaries were not seen as dividing but on the contrary as bringing together elements that otherwise would not have been brought together. Hence he puts forward the idea that boundaries truly had a mediatory function, be it of a political nature, or of a cosmological one – the mediation operates not only between peoples, but also and more importantly for us here, between men and the divine, especially during festival periods. A remarkable feature of the system of beliefs related to water in Scotland, which partakes of the same principle as the one laid out by Ó Riain, is that water from a well where three lands meet, or from the point where three rivers meet, was thought to be especially powerful. This well – and by deduction the rivers or the streams also – constituted not only a boundary separating different estates, but more to the point, a perfect mediatory place between this world and the Otherworld, which the number three only served to emphasise, a place that would have been ideal to conduct rituals destined to bring men and preternatural forces in contact.

In that respect, the fact that water has definite associations with the dead, or more generally with the Otherworld,[6] is well-recognised, as Juliette Wood appreciated when she wrote: 'The sense of a world beyond everyday reality is very strong in Celtic folklore and sites such as lakes and fords and wells are important points of access to the Otherworld.' (Wood 1984: 523)

In view of what was discussed above in relation to the link between festival days and the end and the beginning of the life-cycle, it is possible that the association of water with the world of the dead comes in fact from its uses on Beltane and Samain. Or was water used especially on these festival dates because of its nature of messenger between the human world and the Otherworld? It is in fact probably impossible to tell the two apart; they both form the opposite and complementary sides of the same phenomenon. Suffice it to say that the evidence supporting Wood's statement is quite overwhelming, and comes from various literary as well as folk material.

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[6] The world of the dead and the world in which supernatural beings such as fairies will be considered as being in fact the same one, as fairies were sometimes said to be the dead, and the dead could come back as ghosts – supernatural apparitions if ever there were any.

Scottish ballads such as 'King Orfeo' and 'Thomas the Rhymer' can be taken as fine and very explicit examples of the literary treatment of the belief. Both ballads are related to medieval romances – 'King Orfeo' to *Sir Orfeo*, and 'Thomas the Rhymer' to *Thomas of Erceldoune*.[7] In *Sir Orfeo*, although there seem to be semantic indications that the party of fairy people who abducted took Dame Heurodis across a river,[8] Orfeo himself is not said to have to cross water to take his Dame back. But in the ballad, we are told:

> ...He had not sitten seven long years,
> Till a company to him drew near.
>
> Some did ride and some did ging,
> He saw his Lady them among.
>
> There stood a Haa upon yon hill,
> There went aa the Ladie's tilt.
>
> He is laid him on his belly to swim,
> When he came it was a gray stane.[9]

The image of the fairy abode as a magnificent hall or castle turning into stone or vile materials is fairly common in Scottish fairy beliefs, and can be taken as referring to the fairies' powers, which can be evil as well as benevolent. The latter situation is illustrated in the ballad of Thomas the Rhymer, who was abducted by the Queen of the Fairies, and was later granted the gift of prophecy by her. Thomas also has to cross water:

> The lady rade, True Thomas ran,
> Until they cam to a water wan;
> O it was night, and nae delight,
> And Thomas wade aboon the knee.

The crossing of the water indicates in both ballads that the heroes have changed world. In 'Thomas', moreover, his gift of prophecy emphasises the fact that he has been to the Otherworld. The association of the Otherworld with the faculty of knowing the future underlies the divinatory practices that will be examined in parts 2

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[7] For in-depths treatments of these two ballads and their possible textual origins, see for 'Orfeo' Shuldham-Shaw (1976); and for 'Thomas' Lyle 1970. The subsequent quotations from the ballads are taken from these two sources.

[8] See discussion in Bliss 1966: 52-53, n. 82.

[9] Each verse contains also two lines of refrain, after each line of 'text'. See the article by Shuldham-Shaw (1976) for more details.

and forth between them and humans. To all the functions of the circumambulation that have been previously discussed, we can now add that of opening the passageway between the two worlds, thereby affirming the central character of the well, its role as axis of the world. We can see now that all these aspects – time, centre and ritual – are inter-related, as Eliade noted:

> Just as a 'centre of the world', which is, by definition, in some inaccessible place, can nevertheless be constructed anywhere..., so too, sacred time, generally established by communal feasts and set by the calendar, may be attained at any time and by anyone, simply by repeating an archetypal, mythical gesture. (Eliade 1979 [1958]: 397-398)

Part 2 – Occasional practices

As we shall see, prescriptions regarding the performance of certain rituals at certain times concern both occasional and annual customs. By occasional I mean the practices that occurred when the situation demanded it, for instance in cases of sickness. By contrast, certain rituals only took place periodically – on certain quarter days and other important liminal periods like Yule. While the latter are more community-oriented customs, the former are very personal – they are in fact a continuation of what we saw concerning the healing rituals in the previous chapter – and we shall start the discussion with them.

As I have mentioned above, one of the times believed to be particularly appropriate for the performing of rituals was at a moment called 'between the sun and the sky', which occurred when there was still day-light, but the sun was not visible. This could equally mean before sunrise, 'after daylight appeared, but before the sun rose above the horizon' (G. 1818: 117; see below); or after sunset, 'commonly in the gloamin' (Gregor 1881: 44).[10] The relevance of this specified period to liminality lay with its apparent abnormality: there is light despite the fact that the sun is not visible. Also, it is a situation happening twice in a twenty-four-hour period.[11] This in itself is exceptional in that it goes against the natural, human perception of time – the general experience of time is that it 'flows', 'passes',

[10] The *SND* gives for 'gloamin': 'Evening twilight, dusk'.

[11] This recurring was clearly acknowledged for instance in Benedictine monasteries, where the first and last two canonical hours were dawn and sunrise on the one hand, and sunset and the coming of darkness on the other – as opposed to the other three divisions of the day, these four 'did not have to be announced' (Duncan 1998: 94).

'elapses', but certainly does not repeat itself.[12] Thus, by choosing one of these moments to carry out a ceremony, one could say that the performer acts outside time – he has stopped time, or rather has entered a qualitatively different time: sacred time. It has to be noted here that this does not only concern the time-frame during which the ritual is performed – the 'outside time' – but also the 'internal' time of the ritual, that is the duration of the performance. In this respect, one could say that the extent of the ritual is doubly sacred.[13]

The alternation of sacred and profane, or normal, periods fits in the pattern in three stages devised by Arnold Van Gennep in *Les Rites de passage* (1981 [1909]). In this seminal book on thresholds and the crossing of boundaries, Van Gennep ascribed a tripartite sequence to the crossing of thresholds and boundaries – be they socio-cultural (marriage, pregnancy), material (doors, borders), or temporal (initiation rites). The sequence starts with the pre-liminal stage (before the crossing), continues with the liminal stage (the crossing itself), and ends with the post-liminal stage (the arriving on the other side). These three periods are also known as separation, transition and incorporation phases. Van Gennep developed the concept that any crossing of a boundary represents a danger for the person undergoing the change, a danger alleviated by the observance of these three phases. The success of the passage, which is equivalent to the safety of the individual concerned, depends largely on the completion of each of the three stages. Not completing the three of them, or missing one altogether, would result in the individual remaining in limbo, that is in a liminal state, thereby placing himself or herself outside the community.

Applying Van Gennep's categories to sacred time, and thence to the ritual – performed within and at the same time creating sacred time – we can dissociate the elements of the ritual that we had previously considered together. Thus the circumambulation achieves the separation of the pilgrim from the profane into a new, sacred state; the ablutions with the water from the well coincide with the transitional phase; while the process of incorporation starts with the leaving of the rag/disease behind. The cure then constitutes the indication of the success of the ritual, the sign that it has been completed adequately. The prescriptions relating to silence and time

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[12] Obviously cultural and physical *constructions* of time repeat themselves, like the unit 'day', or the seasons, or the year; however, each day is different from the previous one, etc. Thus the experience of 'time' cannot, by definition, be reproduced (see Gell 1992: 34).

[13] It is in fact more than doubly sacred if we consider other prescriptions such as the circumambulation of the well and the obligation of silence – all these characteristics serve to reinforce not only the sacredness of both ritual and performer, but also to maximise the chances of success of the rite undertaken.

envelop, so to speak, the whole process and are also so many means of designating a sacred spatio-temporal frame and of ensuring the obtaining of the cure.

In terms of beliefs and practices regarding the concepts of centre and of time, the most interesting moment is arguably the intermediate one. This transitional phase is generally considered the most dangerous one because it involves putting in contact two essentially different terms, such as men and deities. In the context of visits to wells – for healing, divination or fertility-related purposes – this phase corresponds, as we have seen earlier, to the opening of a passage between this world and the supernatural world, the establishing of a communication between men and deities. What the transitional phase is meant to achieve is not only a stop in the normal continuous time, but also a reversal of time, which metaphorically takes one 'back to square one' (Gell 1992: 32), that is to say, time reversal allows the performer to return to the mythical *illo tempore*, when men first learnt the ritual from the gods, and first performed it.

Although I have been treating healing and divination-related practices together so far because they both form a mode of communication between men and gods, it should be noted that the nature of the communication involved is different in each of them. Healing rituals, which we have assimilated to sacrificial operations, are distinguished by an initial movement from men to gods – they are a request, initiated by men. Divinatory practices, by contrast, consist of the reading and interpretation of the message sent by the gods to men.[14] As we shall see in the next extract, these messages could come by different means.

> There is a small spring which rises in a circular hollow in a solid rock on the west side of Rhoagie, called *Tobar-na-domhnuich*, the water of which is believed to possess the virtue of indicating whether a sick person shall survive or not. It is taken from the spring before sunrise, and after the patient has been bathed or immersed in it, if the water appears of a pure colour, it foretells his recovery; but, if of a brown mossy colour, that he will die. About six years ago, a mother brought her sickly child a distance of thirty miles, to this spring. On approaching it, she was startled by the appearance of an animal with glaring eye-balls leaping into it. The poor mother considered this as a fatal omen. Her affection for her child, however, overcame her fear. She dislodged the animal and bathed the child, after which he slept more soundly than he had ever done before. This seemed at first to confirm the sanitory virtue of the water, but the child has since died. Within the same period, two friends of a parishioner whose life was

[14] This distinction was made by Cicero (*De Natura Deorum* [3.5]; H. Rackham [tr.] 1951), who, writing about the religion of the Roman people, declared it based on *sacra* and *auspicia*, the former referring to sacrifices and the latter to divination (cf. the discussion in Allen 2000: 136).

> despaired of, went to consult the spring on his behalf, and to fetch some of the water. On placing the pitcher in it, the water assumed a circular motion from south to west. They returned with joy, and informed the patient, that there was no cause to fear, as the motion of the water, being from south to west, was a sure indication that he should recover – whereas, if it had been from north to west, he should die. The person still lives. Such are some of the superstitious notions which prevail in districts of the parish, at the present day. (Noble 1845: 257-258)

Between these two modes of divination, the latter seems to have been predominant as it could be used at any sacred well. Almost two hundred years before Reverend Noble's account, the same type of practice was witnessed by Martin who reported similarly the positive value attributed to the sunwise direction (see discussion on *deiseil* in the previous chapter):

> St Andrew's Well, in the village of Shader, is by the vulgar natives made a test to know if a sick person will die of the distemper he labours under. They send someone with a wooden dish to bring some of the water to the patient, and if the dish which is then laid softly upon the surface of the water turns round sun-ways they conclude that the patient will recover of that distemper, but if otherwise, that he will die. (1994 [1698]: 90)

Two points are worth mentioning regarding divination in general on the one hand, and the implications that the particular modalities described in these two accounts can be seen to have in relation to a certain mode of thinking on the other. The first issue is linked to the conception of time, and to a certain extent, to the nature of the supernatural. Thus, asking a question as to whether someone is going to live or die, implies, from the point of view of the person who is asking, that the deities who send the message not only know the future, but also decide it. This emerges clearly from the first part of Noble's account, in which, although a healing ritual has been performed for the child, the omen conveyed by the troubled water is final.[15]

The second point concerns the 'either-or' situation, characteristic of the modalities of operation of these practices, which is a clear reflection of the binary mode of thinking that we discussed in the previous chapter. Underlying such a dual process is a more general cosmological perception of the world, according to which a certain balance has to be respected in all things – between men and supernatural forces, and

[15] The idea that the Otherworld would know about the issue of a disease comes out very clearly in Pausanias' description of the way the oracle was given 'only in the case of sick folk' at a well dedicated to Demeter (vii, 21): 'They tie a mirror to a fine cord and let it down, judging the distance so that it does not sink deep into the spring, but just far enough to touch the water with its rim. Then they pray to the goddess and burn incense, after which they look into the mirror, which shows them the patient either alive or dead.' (Jones [ed.] 1977: 296-297)

indeed amongst men. Before we get to the latter part of this statement, I should like to explore further the principles according to which the divination system worked.

As we have seen in the two examples quoted above, the question – formulated or not – was to know whether a person was going to recover from an ailment or, on the contrary, die from it. The answer, univocal, came in a 'yes' or 'no' form, and was associated with the motion of the oracle sunwise or withershins respectively. If we now compare this system with another, dual, system, we find that the same structure applies, although it appears to depend on different terms: '[A]t Port-Louis the well is consulted ... through a piece of bread which, by sinking, announces death, by staying on the surface, life'. (Jobbé-Duval 1920: 355; my translation)[16] When I have indicated that this method of divination was practised by Breton wives wanting to know if their fishermen husbands had drowned or were still alive, the sympathetic nature of the belief will clearly emerge – working on the same principle as that associating life with the lucky direction. So both examples deal with life and death matters, both are inscribed in a dual conception of the world, yet the ways in which the practices are conducted differ markedly in the terms they involve. However, as Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated, the terms themselves are not significant; the relevant approach to understanding the society in which the rites are performed is one more concerned with the structure of the rite:

> The terms never possess an intrinsic meaning; their meaning is one 'of position', function of the history and cultural context on the one hand, and on the other hand, of the structure of the system in which they are meant to play a part. (1962: 73; my translation)[17]

This is important in our case because it allows us to perceive the nature of the deep change that has occurred in modern times, in Scotland and presumably in other Western European countries as well. This shift in the perception of the world appears in the recent adaptation of health-related divinatory practices. Thus, during the fieldwork I conducted in May 2000 at Craiguck Well (Black Isle), parts of which were presented in Chapter 2, the older man who told me he had been visiting the well for seventy years also related that they used to come to the well, when someone was ill, to find if the *recovery* was going to be *fast* or *slow*. Although the question is now differently formulated, the terms of the practice have not changed: the man told me

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[16] '... [A] Port-Louis la consultation [de la fontaine] se fait ... au moyen d'un morceau de pain qui, en allant au fond, proclame la mort, en surnageant, la vie'.

[17] 'Les termes n'ont jamais de signification intrinsèque; leur signification est "de position", fonction de l'histoire et du contexte culturel d'une part, et d'autre part, de la structure du système où ils sont appelés à figurer.'

how they would place a twig on the surface of the water, and if it turned sunwise, the recovery would occur quickly, but if it turned in the opposite direction, it would be a slow one. There is no question about life and death here, life is taken for granted. Once we go past the superficial level of analysis of this change – our knowledge of medicine and human physiology have improved to such an extent that we know the causes and consequences of most diseases, and hence what their prognostic is likely to be – we can see how the context has evolved from a plus/minus situation (life being of course the positive term), to a plus/plus situation (death does not figure in the equation anymore). The notion that men's fate is in the hands of the supernatural does not seem to be relevant any longer – although the idea that the future can be known in advance still prevails strongly.

Drawing from this discussion on divinatory principles and from the mechanisms of healing rituals, we can see how *auspicia* and *sacra* are symptomatic of two antagonistic yet concurrent conceptions of the world. In the latter, the assumption is that men can, somehow, influence and even provoke the supernatural powers into reacting as they, human beings, want them to; while on the contrary, the former presents men as submitting passively to the decisions of the supernatural forces. This ambiguity in the connection between humans and deities is perceptible in the structuring pervasiveness of the concept of 'limited good'. Thus, as we are going to see, if the amount of resources depended on the gods, the distribution of these resources could become the subject of negotiations between men and the supernatural powers.

According to the principle of limited good, there was a limited amount of resources available to a community for a certain period, with the corollary that if someone had more than what was estimated to be his or her 'fair' share, it meant that another person at least would have a smaller share than expected – and vice versa. This was most clearly defined by George M. Foster, who proposed that in a 'closed' peasant community, the view was that:

> if 'Good' exists in limited amounts which cannot be expended, and if the system is closed, it follows that *an individual or a family can improve a position only at the expense of others*. Hence an apparent relative improvement in someone's position with respect to any 'Good' is viewed as a threat to the entire community. Someone is being despoiled, whether he sees it or not. (1965: 297; italics in the original)

This pattern is observable in small, close-knit communities, where the situation of one person, or family, could affect the rest of the community – materially as well as

emotionally.[18] At important periods in terms of the accumulating of resources – the start of summer, harvest, the fishing season – elements of social control were established within the community to ensure that a relative state of balance was maintained. This control could often take the form of magic-related measures, which is a consequence of the paradigm proposed by Foster. If the resources were available in finite quantities, and if there was nothing '*directly in the peasant power to increase the available quantities*' (1965: 296; italics in the original), then the only way to obtain more than one's share was to follow a supernatural procedure. Thus, the phenomenon of the 'evil eye' is intimately linked to this context, as someone able to cast the evil eye on other people was supposed to benefit from their misfortune. The following extract illustrates this cluster of beliefs and practices, and places it within the broader system that we have been discussing so far:

> Janet Kindy, otherwise Hurkle Jean, is poor, old, and deformed; her evil eye is so dreaded in this neighbourhood, that the sickness of children and cattle is often attributed to it, and if she happen to cross a fisherman's path as he goes to his boat, the fishing is invariably spoiled for that day. I verily believe that nothing but the fear of the law prevents the tragedy of the witches of Pittenweem from being acted over again, so convinced are her neighbours of her supernatural powers, and so inveterate is their hatred against her. Six years ago, a boat having been for some months unfortunate in fishing, a council of war was held among the elder fishers, and it was agreed that the boat should be exorcised, and that Janet was the spirit which tormented it. Accordingly, the ceremony of exorcism was performed as follows: In each boat there is a cavity called the tap-hole; on this occasion the hollow was filled with a particular kind of water, furnished by the mistress of the boat, a straw effigy of poor Janet was placed over it, and had they dared to touch her life, Janet herself would have been there. The boat was then rowed out to sea before sunrise, and, to use the technical expression, the figure was burnt *between the sun and the sky*, i. e. after daylight appeared, but before the sun rose above the horizon, while the master called aloud, 'Avoid ye, Satan!' The boat was then brought home, and since that time has been fortunate as any belonging to the village. (G., 1818)

The relative lateness of this account shows well how this type of worldview must have been embedded in the structure of every-day life – otherwise it would presumably not have survived until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and even later as we shall see when treating the May Day customs.

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[18] Some of the waterhorse legends that will be discussed in Section three of the thesis show this phenomenon very well (see for instance 'The industrious neighbour' [Appendix 2 – F4.C.3]).

Coexisting with these types of personal, occasional, and unpredictable rituals, ceremonies were also conducted during the course of the year in order to ensure that a certain state of balance was maintained, especially in what the needs of the community were concerned. They respected the same principles as the ones we have been discussing, but had the added element of being performed on set dates. Perhaps because everyone recognised these dates as favourable for getting in contact with the supernatural, the practices were more directed towards the welfare of the community. The following discussion will be focusing on two dates, namely the passage from may Eve to May Day (Beltane) and the passage from the thirty-first of October to the first of November (Samain, or Hallowe'en), which started the summer and winter seasons respectively.

Part 3 – May Eve and Hallowe'en

The existence of two festivals separating the year in a summer half and a winter half are well-attested in the Celtic area as well as around the world.[19] Apart from their quality as both centres and year boundaries, discussed in the first part of the chapter, because of their function of thresholds from one season to the following one, these dates had, unsurprisingly, very strong liminal characteristics. In Alwyn and Brinley Rees's words,

> The dividing line between the contrasting periods of time are haunted by a mysterious power which has a propensity both for good and for evil. ... This supernatural power breaks through in a most ominous way on November Eve and May Eve, the joints between the two great seasons of the year. ... [T]hroughout the Celtic lands chaos was as it were let loose at these two junctures, fairies were unusually active, witches worked their charms, and the future was foreshadowed by omens of all kind. (Rees 1995 [1961]: 89)

I will start this third part with May Eve and May Day customs, because they are strongly linked to the distribution of resources we mentioned earlier, mainly through the 'unusual' activity of the witches mentioned by the Rees brothers.

May Day

As we have seen in Chapter 2, visits to Clootie wells in Scotland are now associated mostly with the first of May, and with yet another form of communication with the supernatural – the making of a wish. Before this evolution took place,

[19] See Nilsson 1920: 55-75 for worldwide examples.

however, visits to wells – not necessarily clootie ones – on the first of May had a very different connotation; their essential purpose was to ensure fertility and abundance for the coming season and consequently the coming year. This makes sense in that the summer season was, and still is, associated with the production of foodstuffs above the ground, as opposed to the slow maturation process of plants underneath the earth, which occurred during the winter season. The custom that I wish to examine here is the taking of the 'cream of the well' on the morning of the first of May, a practice which has been thoroughly examined by Patricia Lysaght in Ireland (1993).

The principle of this custom was to go to a well on May morning so as to be the first to drink or take away some of the water from the well. The custom was strongly linked to the future production of milk, since its principal aim was to ensure that one's milch cows would give enough milk during the summer season to be able to produce as much butter and cheese as would be necessary for the year to come. In this sense, one could say that this May Day custom was really one associated with the first of May as an end/beginning day. Interestingly, the practice seems to have been an 'aggressive' one, since by taking the cream of the well for one's cows, it was well understood that this would effectively mean depriving someone else of the milk represented by the water.

This was especially true of water taken from a boundary well or stream, and, *a fortiori*, of water belonging to one's neighbour's well. Then the milk production would be transferred from one's neighbour's yield to one's own (Lysaght 1993: 32). To accomplish the deed, the thief had to cross the boundary of her neighbour's farm,[20] but in order for the transfer to operate, she then had to cross the boundary back; this second crossing was considered essential to the success of the theft. Lysaght reports that:

> It was considered vital that the well water was not taken across the boundary; a Co. Galway informant states: *Bhíodh daoine ag faire ag an tobar agus ní ligfídís d'aon chailleach braon uisce a thabhairt thar teorann* (People watched the well and they did not allow any old woman to take a drop of the water across the boundary). (1993: 38)[21]

[20] The feminine pronoun is used here as the practice was mostly associated with women.

[21] This belief was also extent in Scotland as is shown in the following extract: 'And in my own recollection, when a death occurred among the cattle in the spring, the *earchall*, or misfortune was put away by conveying, in secrecy and in silence, the hooves of the animal and other portions preferably across a water-boundary to a neighbouring estate or to a wood, where they were buried under the roots of some great tree not likely to be soon moved' (W. Henderson 1879: 193). Just as in the milk-stealing rites, the taking of the disease across a water-boundary was considered a very powerful process – possibly reinforced by the implication that the disease had been left with someone else's cattle.

Apart from watching the well, people performed apotropaic rites on May Eve, intended for the protection of the cows and wells, through the protection and the affirmation of farm boundaries. These could take the form of walking the boundary of the farm, carrying water coming from the place one wanted to protect, putting some iron in the water, or safeguarding the thresholds of the houses and byres with verdure gathered especially for that purpose. As Lysaght concluded,

> By reaffirming farm and domestic booundaries they served to control that threat which they felt emanated from neighbours, any of whom could have the disposition, and power, to harness the preternatural energy of the dangerous transition period of the boundary festival of May, when the supernatural was felt to intrude through the surface of existence. (1993: 42)

This situation is decidedly one in accordance with the concept of limited good as we have defined it earlier, presenting as well an image of strong social control of the distribution of goods produced within the community. The other side to this kind of control meant that if, for some reason or other, resentment had been building up between neighbours, the May Day malevolent practices could procure a 'natural' outlet for accusations, well founded or not. Thus, in Scotland in May 1723, 'Margaret Robertson of Byres of Balmerino in Fife claimed that James Paton had falsely accused her of going to nine wells "to get the cream of the water, and to take away her neighbour's butter"' (Campbell 1899: 462).

The customs and beliefs associated with May Day that we have just seen were also mentioned in relation to the end of the year, as is expressed in the following extract from the end of the nineteenth century:

> Such as were envious of their neighbours' success, and wished to draw away their prosperity, creamed the well they drew water from. This act was believed to be particularly efficacious in ensuring a rich supply of milk and butter to the one who had the cows, and performed the act on the well of those who also owned cows. All the utensils used in the dairy were washed with part of the cream of the well, and the cows received the remainder to drink. This ceremony was gone through in some districts in the last night of the year. In a fishing village on the north-east coast of Aberdeenshire it was performed on the last night of the year, and a handful of grass was plucked and thrown into the pail containing the water. (Gregor 1881: 159)

Although it seems rather curious that the milk production should be assured as early as January, Gregor is usually a reliable source and, what is more, as we shall see in the next chapter, protection rituals for animals were indeed carried out around

the Twelve Days period, some of which involved a horse race to a well, the water of which was believed to grant a yearly protection to the winning horse.

The last comment that I should like to make about the May rituals concerns the protection and delimitation of boundaries, which Lysaght described (1993: 42) as 'a very conscious ritual niggardliness' in a context that is otherwise characterised by the fact that 'families are inner-oriented [and] neighbourliness is put aside'. There we have, perhaps, an indication that Beltane is also a temporal centre. Thus, the rites focus not only on the re-birth of nature – implying the notion that death precedes it and thence its symbolic role of end/beginning festival – but also on the securing, the enclosure, of vital resources – the calendar centre aspect. By contrast, Hallowe'en, as a calendar end/beginning festival, is about protecting the community of the living from intrusions from the dead; whereas as a symbolic centre, it is associated with marriage and therefore the reproduction of society. The dynamic relation between those terms can hence be qualified as a centrifugal one at the symbolic level, but as a centripetal one on the calendar level.

Hallowe'en

I would like to approach Hallowe'en from a different angle than the one I chose for May Day, since the theoretical discussion initiated above applies, in an inverted manner, also to Hallowe'en. Rather, I should like to look at this festival from the perspective of the exchanges taking place at that time of the year between the living and the dead. Traditional 'night of the dead' at least in the Celtic context, Hallowe'en is marked in Scotland by diverse practices among which divinatory rituals concerning marriage are prominent. It has to be noted here that I take marriage as symbolising the means to the end that is having children so that the community can literally reproduce itself, and the social order of life can be perpetuated.

The societal and cosmological need to attribute a set time for the celebration of the dead stems from the need to address the issue of the utter unpredictability of death, and therefore the lack of control society can exercise over it:

> While death as an event may defy all regularity, the dead are eventually incorporated into the predictable cycle of the year and are harnessed (however imperfectly) to the reproduction of social life. (Bloch and Parry 1982: 10)

The reproduction of social life at that moment of the 'predictable cycle of the year' emerges through the presence of both elements, death and fertility, associated in the

narratives relating the performance of a divinatory custom to know who one was going to marry:

> *Washing the sleeve of the shirt* – The maiden went to a south-running stream, or to a ford where the dead and the living crossed, and washed the sleeve of her shirt. She returned home, put on a large fire, and hung the shirt in front of it. She went to bed, and from it kept a careful watch. The apparition of him who was to be her partner in life came and turned the wet sleeve. (Gregor 1881: 85)

This extract, and thence the custom itself, is very rich, playing as it does on different levels of symbolism. Although the 'south-running' characteristic of the stream is here presented as being an equivalent alternative to a 'a ford where the dead and the living crossed', they touch different strata of the belief in the supernatural. While in the first one, what is referred to is mostly the auspicious aspect of the southward direction, which was important to ensure the success of the ceremony; the second introduces the notion that water acted as a boundary, both physical and metaphorical, between the living and the dead. Certainly, the 'apparition' of the future husband does not belong to this world, and can be regarded as coming from the future, from beyond the water. A variant of this custom was attested in Scotland two centuries before Gregor's time by John Erskine of Carnock, who described in his diary for the 31st October 1684: 'This night I observed more freets and devilish customs [some people] practice on Hallow even, as going to a south-running well,[22] and dipping their arm or sleeve in it, and they say, if after that, they speak not till they sleep, they will dream of the person they will marry' (MacLeod [ed.] 1893). We recognise in the prescription related to silence, the indication that the custom involved a contact of some sort with the supernatural. Further details can be obtained from a Welsh instance recorded by Jones:

> In the Tir Iarll district (Glam.) it was customary for the woman (or man) to take an undergarment secretly from the house, and then dip it in the well. It was carried home as secretly, held in the teeth, and untouched by hands, draped over the back of a chair near the fire – again without using the hands. The woman then retired to a corner of the room and waited. If the oracle was favourable, the wraith of the future partner would appear, turn the garment round and depart. (1992: 110)

[22] The word 'well' does not render the idea of a stream any more, but it used to, according to the definitions given both by the *Scottish National Dictionary* ('A natural spring of water that forms a pool or a stream'), and the *Oxford English Dictionary* ('A spring of water rising to the surface of the earth and forming a small pool or flowing in a stream; a pool (or rarely a stream) fed by a spring' [second edition]).

Although there is no mention of a date, or of a time of the year, this is a very important instance for it corroborates the early Scottish evidence that this kind of practice used to be performed at the well, before it shifted to water being brought from the well into the house.[23] In either case, the use of a soaked garment for divination purposes seems to have persisted.[24]

Past the first instinctive reaction that death should be opposed to marriage, or at least that the two do not fit together, we can see how, from a structural point of view, they do in fact have similarities. Following Bloch and Parry's statement that attributing a set date to celebrate the dead is a process carried out in order to incorporate the factor 'death' into a cyclic system devised by the living, and therefore into society, marriage, in a similar way, institutionalises and incorporates the unpredictable elements that are single men and women.[25] As I mentioned earlier, this incorporation is mainly relevant in terms of the offspring anticipated from marriages, which makes sense from a cosmological perspective. Indeed, one has to consider that a death occurring in a community represents a shift in the more or less balanced situation between the dead and the living in any community at any given time. Logically, the most simple way to remedy the situation is to create a new life. This new life can be the child born as a consequence of the union 'foretold' on Hallowe'en, or it can also be the addition of a new member into the community, through the system of alliance.

Conclusion

Water works especially well as a kind of boundary – whether it be as a centre or as a frame – because of its fluid nature. One can go into the water, even underneath the surface, and then come back to the firm ground. All the applications that we have been discussing in this chapter, in literature or in real life, stemming from the belief in water as a boundary seem to parallel this possibility of a bi-directional movement. The assumption in divination practices, by definition, is that the performer is looking

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[23] See for instance in Banks, vol. 3: 141 (quoting from Maclagan Mss; no page number): 'A custom that prevailed among lads [in Skye] was to soak their shirt sleeve in a tub of water, which had to be done in the name of the Evil One, and it was said that anyone who did this would obtain a view of his future wife, who would pass before him while his sleeve was being soaked'.

[24] Jocelyne Bonnet mentions divination practices, performed in Alsace by women, during the seasonal washing at the start of spring and autumn, that consisted in throwing clothes in the water, to make predictions 'on their projects, the thoughts they gave their husbands, their boyfriends' [sur leurs projets, les pensées qu'elles prêtaient à leurs maris, leurs amis] (1986: 182; my translation).

[25] See below in Chapter 8 a system of oppositions related to marriage in Scotland.

into the future, that is to say he or she is going to a future time and coming back to the present time. In literature also, there are examples of travellers coming back from the world of the dead, the Otherworld that lies beyond the water. Thomas the Rhymer, King Orfeo: both crossed the water to this Otherworld and came back, changed men, from it.

Changes, transformations from one state to another – from being sick to being cured for instance – are very much at the core of the crossing of a boundary. What we have been able to establish, however, is that placing oneself in a liminal state during certain rituals, corresponds in fact to entering a centre – spatial or temporal. This centralisation of the self is furthermore present at the societal and cosmological levels. Thus we concluded from the discussion on symbolic and calendar divisions of the year, that the festivals under consideration, Beltane and Samain were in fact at the same time centre and end/beginning festivals. However, we were able to distinguish between the symbolic, which seems to be aiming towards the reproduction of society through what are essentially metaphorical fertility rites; and on the opposite, calendar centres and end/beginning poles seem to act as 'practical' social controls. What we are going to explore in the next chapter is based on the same principles, but is related to two different periods, revolving around harvest on the one hand, and Christmas on the other.

CHAPTER 5

RITUAL HORSE RACES AND THE RENEWAL OF THE YEAR

Introduction

The supernatural powers of wells were not reserved to humans only: there is evidence for the involvement of horses in ritual celebrations, during which they were 'blessed' with water from a well, a lake or even the sea, celebrations strongly linked, in my view, with yearly fertility festivals.

In addition to the system of the four quarter days, further divisions to the ritual year existed, the four cross-quarter days, which fell on or around the two solstices and equinoxes, namely midsummer and midwinter, Michaelmas and St Patrick's day. They are found in Scotland as seasonal markers in the following rhyme:

> Autumn till Nollaig [Christmas],
> Winter till St Patrick's day [17th March],
> Spring till St Peter's day [29th June],
> Summer till Michaelmas [29th September].[1]

One can note at this point that different needs and preoccupations are reflected in the various interpretations of the calendar cycle. The concept of "New Year" does not necessarily entail a single point in time, valid and meaningful for everyone. Distinct significant points in time would have corresponded to different social categories of people, and would have been recognised within a particular category – e.g. the start of the fishing season for fishermen, or of harvest for cultivators.

It is then perhaps not surprising that both cross-quarter and quarter days should have been marked by ritual celebrations, which varied according to the season and the place. The particular feature of some of these celebrations that is of interest to us here consisted of horse-races. These races carried very strong symbolic and sacred connotations that are not only inherent in the specific date at which they happened, but can also be partly deduced from what else was happening on the day of the races: this will be treated in more detail below. [2] As to the use of the term 'horse-race' to describe the part of the festival that involved horses, two points have to be made before treating it in more detail. First, I use this single term to refer in fact to two

[1] Banks, 1937-1941, vol. 2: 4. In Ireland, these cross-quarter days are called the 'crooked quarters', as opposed to the 'true quarters'.

[2] I am here referring to the importance of certain kinds of food at Lammas in Ireland, Michaelmas in the Hebrides, and on St Stephen's day in Scandinavia and France.

aspects of the 'race': on the one hand, we have the 'circuiting' (as Carmichael calls it, see below), that is to say the course that the riders follow, whether it be from the sea-shore to the village, or around a church or a sacred place; on the other hand, we have the bathing of the animals, considered to bring them 'good luck' and health.[3] Second, the riders do not seem to have competed for personal gain, as the modern acceptation of 'race' entails. The winner was certainly rewarded with prestige and possibly 'good luck', but, as we will see from different descriptions, because of its symbolic importance and implications, the fact that the race was held mattered more than who won.

Part 1 – A question of time

Starting with the temporal dimension, some festivals appear to be more relevant in the study of the races than others, for a given place; thus Lammas (or Lughnasa) was celebrated mostly in Ireland, while Michaelmas was extremely popular in the Hebrides, and in Brittany such ritual races were still witnessed at the end of the 1920s on the 8 September, the day celebrating the birth of Our Lady. Midwinter, or to be more precise, St Stephen's Day (26 December) is documented for Scandinavian countries – and, if rarely, for Scotland and France as well. These different dates for what was in essence the same festival make sense when taken in the context of harvesting – not only cereals, but other crops as well – a point that emerges from the accounts themselves. The lateness of St Stephen's Day, still in terms of harvesting, seems nevertheless relevant in view of the ethnographic material at our disposal, as I will try to demonstrate.

Time is clearly of the essence, and what has been said about the period during which healing wells were known to be more powerful than usual – 'atween the sun and the sky', before sunrise and after sunset, especially on the 1st of May – applied to the other transition days as well. Máire MacNeill gives this Irish instance from St Ciarán's, or Kieran's, Well, co. Meath, in which the importance of time in the ritual bathing of the horses is clearly stated (1962: 262):

> It is believed that a special virtue is inherent in the water from midnight to midnight of the festival [of Lughnasa, celebrated here on the first Sunday in August], and custom implies that the virtue is most potent at the initial midnight hour. Horses were then ridden through the stream to preserve them

[3] Bathing the horses could be replaced by sprinkling them with holy water, or having them drink such sacred water: all conveyed the same intention of blessing.

> from danger during the coming year, and this custom was still being performed in the middle of the twentieth century.

This custom of bathing horses at a certain time of the year to ensure them a year of good health has been described by Breton author Pierre Jakez Hélias, as he witnessed it at the end of the 1920s at Penhors, on the Breton coast south-west of Quimper. There a yearly ritual bath took place on the day of the great pardon of Notre-Dame de Penhors, on the 8th of September:

> And it was there [at the beach at Penhors, as the tide was going out] that I saw half a dozen horses going in, led by the same number of peasants, dressed only in old trousers and old shirts, which was a strange way to dress on the day of the great pardon. However, it was the custom, after the great labours of August, to bathe the horses. And not only to wash their hides. This ritual bath, according to old men, brought them luck and health, as much as a priest's blessing did. And it was also the occasion, for the landowners and the foremen, to show off their skill and bravery. I could clearly see that the horses snorted at going into the waves. There were two that did not want to comply, going round in circles neighing, or trying to rear up as best as they could. And one of those ended up throwing his rider off. On the shore, the people burst out laughing. Looking like a drowned rat, the man got out of the water, all the more humiliated that some girls, with floating headdresses, had witnessed his discomfiture. ... The horse followed him without any rancour. At that moment the bell rang for vespers. The shore emptied straight away. It would not have done to be seen there after vespers had started. (Hélias 1975: 181; my translation)[4]

The horses' yearly ritual bath could occur, as I have mentioned, at different dates in different places. In Ireland, the bathing and/or swimming of the horses was principally a Lughnasa rite. It was still performed in 1930 on 15 August in Martry, on the river Blackwater, Co. Meath. Previously, the races had been held on the other side of the river, at Teltown, on the first Sunday in August. This change in the date and location seem to have stemmed from the Christianisation of the occasion:

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[4] "Et c'est là [sur la plage de Penhors à marée descendante] que je vois s'avancer une demi-douzaine de chevaux menés par autant de paysans vêtus seulement d'un vieux pantalon et d'une vieille chemise, chose étrange un jour de grand pardon. Mais c'est la coutume, après les grands travaux du mois d'août, de baigner les chevaux. Pas seulement pour leur laver la peau. Ce bain rituel, selon les vieux, leur porte chance et santé autant que la bénédiction d'un prêtre. Et c'est aussi l'occasion, pour les propriétaires et les grands valets, de montrer leur habileté et leur hardiesse. Je vois bien que les chevaux renâclent pour s'avancer dans les vagues. Il y en a deux qui ne veulent rien savoir, qui tournent sue eux-mêmes en hennissant ou cherchent à se cabrer du mieux qu'ils peuvent. Et l'un de ceux-là finit par désarçonner son cavalier. Les gens s'esclaffent sur la grève. Trempé comme une soupe, l'homme sort de l'eau, d'autant plus humilié que des jeunes filles, toutes coiffes dehors, sont témoins de sa déconfiture. ... Le cheval le suit sans rancune. C'est alors que la cloche appelle pour les vêpres. Aussitôt la grève se vide. Il ne ferait pas bon être vu dessus quand les vêpres sont commencées."

> Eventually the games became merged in the pattern of Martry on the other side of the river Blackwater. ... But a custom with a distinct pagan touch was the swimming of horses in the river Blackwater before sunrise in the morning as a protection against disease. The horse carrying an almost naked rider was jumped or plunged into a deep pool in the river: it was necessary that the animal be completely wetted by the water. This custom survived until the present generation. (Morris 1930: 114)

A rather rare piece of information in the Scottish context indicates that this kind of Lughnasa, or Lammas, custom was practised in Scotland as well, on that particular date, in contrast with the bulk of the material at our disposal that focusses on Michaelmas. It presumably followed the same pattern as the Irish and French ceremonials that have been quoted; in any case, it presents the same bathing element. The following extract constitutes the reaction of the Synod of Lothian and Tweddale to a report made by members appointed by the Assembly to go through the books of the presbyteries under the jurisdiction of the Synod:

> The assemblie finds by the report of these who are appoynted to visit ther book ane reference for advyse for censureing of those for wasching their horsis in the sea on Lambes day quhen it happins to fall on a Sabboth day. The assemblie ordaines the ministeris of ilk kirk to intimat to ther parochineris that if they doe the lyke in tyme cumming, they sall be censured as prophaneris of the Lords day.[5]

This prohibition presents the added interest of predating the main corpus of Scottish examples by half a century, and of coming from the east coast of Scotland – Leith is Edinburgh's port – when the bulk of the accounts come from the Hebrides.

Hélias's remark that the ritual he describes was connected with the August harvest helps to explain the disparity in the dates at which the custom occurred. The Breton example seems to bring a ritual end to the harvesting season. The race, the bathing of the horses, as well as mass and vespers which took place on that day can then be regarded as 'thanksgiving' ceremonies for the crop that had just been gathered, as well as, one could argue, acting as propitiatory rites for the following year's crop. In Ireland and Scotland, however, the notion of 'first fruits' of the crop, as well as of the flock, predominates. In the Irish context, the races were said to be 'ushering in' Autumn and the coming harvest. In co. Leitrim, the first new potatoes were dug up and eaten prior to the occasion as a symbol for the crops to come (MacNeill 1962:

[5] Kirk (ed.) 1977: 189 (the Assembly was held on 3rd November 1646). A piece of evidence exists that the interdiction to bathe the horses in the sea at Lammas was relayed to parishioners, at the Kirk level, eight months later, closer to the date of the festival. It was then 'ordained that non goe to Leith on Lambes-day, nor tak their horses to be washed that day in the sea.' (Dalyell 1834: 88).

254). In the Hebrides, the cake specially baked on St Michael's was made with a measure of each of the crops of the croft, reaped especially in advance. It was a very important feature of the saint's day, with some cakes being baked for the family, while others were intended for the poor (see Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 1: 200-201).

The extracts that I am now going to present come from various writers living at various times. They cover mainly the western islands of Scotland, and describe the festivities as they were held on St Michael's Day. I have chosen to present them all together, giving, when necessary, a comment on the interest they represent – for my argument, or, as ethnographic pieces, in their own right. Although it might appear repetitive, this presentation makes it clear how vivid and popular the custom was in the Hebrides well into the nineteenth century. The information given by Martin Martin as to whether a particular island was mostly Catholic or Protestant shows that, as far as the keeping of the 'cavalcade' was concerned, denomination did not enter into consideration, which would, in my view, seem to indicate a pre-Christian origin of the custom.

The extracts have been ordered chronologically, following a broad Northwest-Southeast axis. They start with St Kilda, as the most western of the Scottish islands.

St Kilda

> The inhabitants [of St Kilda] ride their horses (which were but eighteen in all) at the anniversary cavalcade of All-Saints; this they never fail to observe. They begin at the shore, and ride as far as the houses; they use no saddles of any kind, nor bridle, except a rope of straw which manages the horse's head; and when they have all taken the horses by turns, the show is over for that time. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 317)

The mention of men riding without any saddles or bridles is a recurrent one in the Scottish material, and it was noted too in Irish cases.[6] Also in Ireland, manufactured items related to horse/cattle husbandry were thrown into a small lough, called locally a well, during the Lughnasa festival.[7] The bringing together of objects belonging to the human world with the natural element, here a well, serves, in my view, to stress the connection between the two, between the human and the supernatural worlds. In the Hebrides, the preparations leading to St Michael's Day included the gathering of wild carrots by the women. Carmichael points out their obvious character of fertility

[6] For instance, Lady Gregory recalled, in her autobiography, how such a race had been described to her in 1898, by an old friend living on the coast at Kinvara, co. Galway: 'The Count remembered when on Garlic Sunday men used to ride races, naked, on unsaddled horses out into the sea; but that wild custom had long been done away with by decree of the priests.' (1914: 3-4)

[7] See MacNeill 1962: 252.

symbols (1900-1971, vol. 1:) but their 'wild' nature makes them also a link between the wild and the cultivated areas, respectively the supernatural and human spheres of influence.

> They observe the festivals of Christmas, Easter, Good-Friday, St Columba's Day, and that of All Saints; upon this they have an anniversary cavalcade, the number of their horses not exceeding eighteen; these they mount by turns, having neither saddle nor bridle of any kind, except a rope, which manages the horse only on one side; they ride from the shoar to the house, and then after each man has performed his tour, the show is at an end. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 443-444)

This second account from Martin is extracted from his *Voyage to St Kilda*, which, in the 1994 edition, is published after the *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland circa 1695*. Noteworthy is the mention that the 'anniversary cavalcade' took place 'from the shoar to the house': in view of the Breton and Irish instances quoted above, the implied proximity of the sea makes it tempting to think that there too the horses were driven into the water. The fact that each man performed a 'tour', could indicate that the horses followed a particular circuit, possibly round the 'house' mentioned.

> For divertisement, the inhabitants [of St Kilda] ride their horses at the anniversary cavalcade of *Michaelmas*, this they never fail to observe. They begin at the shoar, and ride as far as the houses; they use no saddles of any kind, nor bridle, but a rope of straw, which manages the horses head; and when they have all taken the horses by turns, the show is over for that time. These superstitious days they observe very punctually, they being at certain set times, and they call them Holy-days; but can give no reason for this observance, other than practical antiquity. (Buchan 1741: 32)

> They observe, says [Martin; see above] the festivals of *Christmas*, *Easter*, *Good-Friday*, *St Columba's Day*, and that of *All Saints*; upon this they have an anniversary cavalcade. But this is a mistake; for their cavalcade is at *Michaelmas*. (Buchan 1741: 38)

Alexander Buchan was a minister, and he was first sent to St Kilda in 1704. He stayed there for five years, and returned to the mainland in 1709, only to go back to the island in 1710. He was self-admittedly strongly impressed by Martin's book, and although he clearly used Martin in the writing of his own volume, Buchan also noted Martin's mistake concerning All Saints, opposing his long stay on the island to Martin's fleeting visit as evidence of his accuracy. At any rate, Martin's confusion of

All Angels' Day (Michaelmas) with All Saints' Day is further illustrated (see under South Uist).

> At *Michaelmas* the ablest horsemen among them ride their little high mettled nags, like so many Numidians or old Britains, without saddles, stirrups or bridles. Those who distinguish themselves in these races, are supremely happy in the rewards of glory and honour which they obtain. (Macaulay 1764: 81-82)

Outer Hebrides

Lewis

> The inhabitants are all Protestants except one family, who are Roman Catholics. ... The Protestants natives observe the festivals of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Michaelmas: upon this last they have an anniversary cavalcade, and then both sexes ride on horseback. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 108)

Martin notes the participation of 'both sexes rid[ing] on horseback' seemingly after the cavalcade. From the subsequent accounts, it appears that women rode behind their cavalier before and/or after the cavalcade, that is to say before or after the ritual performance had taken place. Apart from one later instance (Campbell's 1902 description of the race in Barra), the role of women seems to have been linked more with the gathering and preparation of certain foodstuffs.

Harris

> [The proprietor of the isle] and all the inhabitants are Protestants, and observe the festivals of Christmas, Good Friday, and St Michael's Day. Upon the latter they rendezvous on horse-back, and make their cavalcade on the sands at low water. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 125-126)

The location of the cavalcade brings to mind the Breton case (a shore at low tide). Incidentally, the use of the word 'cavalcade' really points towards a ritual race, where there is no immediate or visible prize to be won. This was also the sense of Macaulay's contribution about St Kilda, as I understand it.

> The last great 'oda' occurred ... in Harris in 1818 ... [I]n Harris, [the sports were held] on 'Traigh Chliamain', Strand of St Clement. (Carmichael 1900-1971, vol. 2: 338)

For 'oda', Carmichael gives: 'race, racecourse, the scene of the athletics of the men and the racing of the horses' (1900-1971, vol. 2: 337).

North Uist

> The natives [of North Uist] are much addicted to riding, the plainness of the country disposing both men and horses to it. They observe an anniversary cavalcade on Michaelmas Day, and then all ranks of both sexes appear on horse-back. The place for this rendezvous is a large piece of firm sandy ground on the sea-shore, and there they have horse-racing for small prizes, for which they contend eagerly. There is an ancient custom, by which it is lawful for any of the inhabitants to steal his neighbour's horse the night before the race, and ride him all next day, provided he deliver him safe and sound to the owner after the race. The manner of running is by a few young men, who use neither saddles nor bridles, except two small ropes made of bent instead of a bridle, nor any sort of spurs, but their bare heels ... This is a happy opportunity for the vulgar, who have few occasions for meeting except on Sundays: the men have their sweethearts behind them on horsebacks, and give and receive mutual presents. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 147)

This extract is interesting on several counts, if also confusing on the point of the 'small prizes': this is the only indication of a prize, however small, being given at this kind of race.[8] However, in the light of the other evidence, I would tend to think it an isolated development, which does not weaken the main argument for the ritual character of the occasion. It is worthy of note that 'both sexes appear on horse-back', but only the men will ride the race, as it echoes the situation met in Lewis, to cite but one of the islands. Lastly, the fact that it was 'lawful for any of the inhabitants to steal his neighbour's horse' makes for a notable antecedent of a practice that Carmichael will describe over two centuries later.[9]

> The last great 'oda' in North Uist was in 1866, and took place on the customary spot, 'Traigh Mhoire', the strand of Mary, on the west side of the island. (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 1: 207)

Benbecula

> The last great 'oda' occurred ... in Benbecula in 1830 ... [I]n Benbecula, [the sports were held] on 'Machair Bhaile-mhanaich', plain of the townland of the monks. (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 2: 338)

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[8] Carmichael does mention a small money token for one such occasion, adding immediately that the money thus won was spent the same day, as it was not for keeping. See 1900-1971, vol. 1: 205.

[9] 'It is permissible on this night to appropriate a horse, wherever found and by whatever means, on which to make the pilgrimage and to perform the circuiting. ... The people act upon this ancient privilege and steal horses without compunction... It is obligatory to leave one horse with the owner to carry himself and his wife on the pilgrimage and to make the circuiting, but this may be the worst horse in the townland.' (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 1: 200).

> The following notes from Father Allan MacDonald, taken from a letter dated 'Dalibrog, 21st December 1898', may be added to the account of the Feast of St Michael. ... 'Even in Benbecula the going to the St Michael's races was called "dol a Chille Mhìcheil" ["going to St Michael's church"].' I do not know if there was such a dedication in Benbecula; my informant, a native of Benbecula, never heard of such a dedication. (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 3: 140)

South Uist

> [The proprietor of the isle] and all the inhabitants are Papists, except sixty, who are Protestants. The Papists observe all the festivals of their Church, they have a general cavalcade on All-Saints Day, and then they bake St Michael's cake at night, and the family and strangers eat it at supper. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 155)

Here we see clearly that Martin was mistaken about All Saints: firstly because St Michael's cake was baked only on the day of the saint's festival and, secondly, because the cavalcade festivities seem so far to have been linked, in the Hebrides, exclusively to Michaelmas. The sharing of the cake between family and 'strangers' was seemingly very important, in that no one should be left without any piece of the cake, or of the lamb that was killed specially for the occasion. According to Carmichael, this tradition was still very much alive at the time he collected his information (1900-1971, vol. 1: 202-203).

> The last circuiting with service was performed in south Uist in 1820. It took place as usual round Cladh Mhicheil, the burial-ground of Michael, near the centre of the island. (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol 1: 207)

> In Norway, the horse-fight took place in August, on Lovisae Dag, the horse-combat finishing up the sports of the festival. By a curious coincidence, the horse-races of Norway and the principal horse-race of the Western Isles, that of South Uist, ceased in the same year, 1820, and in two succeeding months. (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 2: 338)

These two comments by Carmichael call for a more detailed comparison with Norway than is hinted at: indeed, the 'circuiting' was part of horse-racing customs performed there on St Stephen's Day, customs which also entailed racing towards a well to get the 'cream', as a yearly blessing. This will be dealt with at greater length in the second part of this chapter.

Barra

> All the inhabitants [of Barra] observe the anniversary of St Barr, being the 27th of September; it is performed on horseback, and the solemnity is concluded by three turns round St Barr's church. ... They have likewise a general cavalcade on St Michael's Day, in Kilbar village, and do then also take a turn round their church. Every family, as soon as the solemnity is ended, is accustomed to bake St Michael's cake, as above described, and all strangers, together with those of the family, must eat the bread that night. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 163-164)

It is interesting to have here the 'full' description of the route followed by the cavalcade, one or more turns around the church, in a similar fashion to what Carmichael had reported for South Uist – only there people went round the graveyard. We have seen the properties of circumambulation in relation to the healing rituals at sacred wells: the cavalcade, with both the going round and the watery element seems to mirror, for horses, what happened in the human sphere. Running the races on a 'level green' and not round the church, as it was witnessed in the same island of Barra two centuries after Martin's visit there, might be the sign of a custom still performed by the islanders, but cut off from the knowledge of its origins and purpose.

> Michaelmas (*Feill Mìcheil*) is also known in the Roman Catholic districts of the Highlands as "the Riding Day" (*latha na marcachd*). On the level green of Borg (*machaire Bhorg*), in Barra, a great race is held, the women bringing the horses, and sitting behind the men on horseback. In the scamper that ensues, it is a lucky sign if the woman tumbles off. All the expenses of the festivity are borne by the women, each of whom takes with her to the racecourse a large thick bannock of oatmeal, made with treacle, butter, etc. (Campbell 1902: 281)

As in the North Uist description given by Martin, men and women are both involved in the race; the 'lucky sign' of women falling off from the horses, however, is not, to my knowledge, mentioned anywhere else. Conversely, what is signalled elsewhere are the expenses being 'borne by the women'. Pennant made a surprised note of it (see under Canna), and Solheim's reflection on one aspect of the St Stephen's Day races certainly leads one to think that this behaviour was also known in Norway.[10] It can be noted now that one reason for the lack of evidence regarding St Stephen's

[10] 'The term *støylshans* [used to designate a gathering with food and drink organised by the boys to entertain the girls] seems to indicate that the motive for the feast [held at Christmas time] was that the boys come together and treat the sæter girls, as an answer to the gifts of the new summer produce (in the form of special cheeses or unusually good porridge) which the sæter girls presented at the sæter feast in the summer.' (1956: 152)

festivities lies perhaps with the determination of the Reformed Church to get rid of Christmas celebrations.[11] It is apparent now that this eventually failed as far as Christmas itself is concerned, but it is legitimate to ask to what extent it did succeed in doing away with the 'side traditions'. The reason why I think it possible that the Hebrides did perform what are, essentially, 'New Year' customs around midwinter, is the cluster of concepts and activities that are to be found in relation to the races: these will be further explored in the second part of this chapter; suffice it to say here that wherever we have evidence for harvest-related customs involving horses, we also have new-year type rituals with the direct, or indirect, presence of the horse.

> The last great 'oda' occurred in Barra in 1828 ... In Barra the 'oda' was held on the 25th of September, being the Day of St Barr, the patron saint of the island; in all other places on 29th September, being the Day of St Michael, the patron saint of horses and of the Isles. In Barra the sports were held on 'Traigh Bharra', 'Strand of St Barr'. (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 2: 338)

Inner Hebrides

Skye

> The proprietors and all the inhabitants are Protestants, except twelve, who are Roman Catholics. The former observe the festivals of Christmas, Easter, Good Friday, and that of St Michael's. Upon the latter they have a cavalcade in each parish, and several families bake the cake called St Michael's Bannock. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 250)

Canna

> Here [on Canna] are very few sheep: but horses in abundance. The chief use of them in this little district is to form an annual cavalcade at Michaelmas. Every man on the island mounts his horse unfurnished with saddle, and takes behind him either some young girl, or his neighbour's wife, and then rides backwards and forwards from the village to a certain cross, without being able to give any reason for the origin of this custom. After the procession is over, they alight at some public house, where, strange to say, the females treat the companions of their ride. (Pennant 1998 [1772]: 271-272)

This extract is appealing in that it gives a strong sense of the people Pennant was writing about. Some of the information we are presented with deserves further comment, namely the fact that the women participate in the cavalcade and the

[11] The records from the presbytery of Lanark contain in fact the mention that in 1650, the Commission of the Kirk declared 'Thursday the 26 of December to be keeped as a solemne fast and humiliation' to punish the King and his family for their 'sinnes' (Robertson [ed.] 1839: 88).

observation that people ride 'backwards and forwards from the village to a certain cross, without being able to give any reason for the origin of this custom'. This seems to indicate the evolution and degeneracy of the races. Evolution because the incorporation of the women in the cavalcade does not seem either bad or good. Degeneracy because of the ignorance of the origin or meaning of the practice is probably what will lead to a change in the custom, such as what Campbell saw on Barra: having lost the reason behind the circumambulation, it disappeared, while the now 'diminished' races lasted on, considered merely games – 'sports', as Carmichael calls them.

Coll

> [The proprietor of the isle] and all the inhabitants are Protestants; they observe the festivals of Christmas, Good-Friday, Easter and St Michael: at the latter they have a general cavalcade. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 297)

Tiree

> The inhabitants are all Protestants; they observe the festivals of Christmas, Good-Friday, Easter, and St Michael's Day. Upon the latter there is a general cavalcade, at which all the inhabitants rendezvous. (Martin 1994 [1698]: 296)

Iona

> I went to the South west part of the Island [of Iona] and in half a mile passed by a fine small green hill, called Angel Hill [Cnoc nan-aingeal], where they bring their horses on the day of St Michael and All Angels, and run races round it. (Pococke 1887 [1760]: 86)

> On my return saw, on the right hand, on a small hill, a small circle of stones, and a little cairn in the middle, evidently Druidical, but called 'the hill of the angels', Cnoc-nar-Aimgeal; from a tradition that the holy man [St Columba] had there a conference with those celestial beings soon after his arrival. Bishop Pocock informed me, that the natives were accustomed to bring their horses to this circle at the feast of St Michael, and to course round it. I conjecture that this usage originated from the custom of blessing the horses in the days of superstition, when the priest and the holy water-pot were called in: but in latter times the horses are still assembled, but the reason forgotten. (Pennant 1998 [1772]: 252)

This conjecture by Pennant is useful, and by all accounts very sound. It brings back to our attention the religious and ritual aspects of the races, indeed their *raison d'être*, that have been neglected a little by Martin, for instance, to the benefit of the more popular side of the 'cavalcades'. The 'holy water-pot' is strongly reminiscent

of that Breton instance quoted earlier, in which the narrator related how the horses' yearly ritual bath was thought at least as powerful as a priest's blessing to keep them in good health.

From all the ethnographic material presented above, we can now draw out several distinctive features. First, the racing and bathing of horses formed an important part of harvest-related festivals, whether at the start of, or after the harvest itself. Second, the bathing itself had a strong prophylactic purpose: it was a 'yearly ritual bath', necessary to keep one's horses in good health, for the following year. Third, the role played by both sexes on the day of the festival and the importance of certain foodstuffs – the specially baked bannock and the gathering of wild carrots for instance –, all convey the sense that this was a festival of fertility, which is perhaps not surprising in the context of harvest. Although the practices described are remarkably interesting in their own right, they take on further meaning when read in a slightly different perspective, that given by a set of customs performed around midwinter, namely on St Stephen's Day (26 December).

Part 2 – Winter Celebrations

Horse-racing/-bathing seems strongly linked to agricultural activities, that is to say it is linked to food, fertility of the land, abundant crops. The occurrence of these rituals at the start or at the end of harvest has its counterpart in those coinciding with the new solar year: all denote the nature-renewal purpose of the custom. This is especially clear from the sacrificial element present in the latter, and I shall now turn to that particular development.

The customs and beliefs associated with St Stephen's Day are found in diverse parts of Europe, from Ireland to Greece, mainly in relation to the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' period, that starts on the 26 December, and runs until Epiphany, on 6 January.[12] The material I am going to discuss comes mainly from Scandinavia, Ireland and France, for, as has been pointed out above, very scant evidence survives for Scotland. However, one account from Alves, on the east coast of Scotland in Morayshire, confirms that such races as the ones held on Michaelmas happened on St Stephen's Day as well, in a striking parallel with Scandinavia. Other practices elsewhere will also be taken into account to make sense of the material gathered so far. The extract below is taken from MacFarlane's *Geographical Collections*

[12] For a fairly extensive overview of the beliefs and practices peculiar to this time of the year in Europe – principally Central and Eastern Europe –, see Dumézil 1929 (especially the first part).

(Mitchell [ed.] 1906: 238), and although it is not dated precisely, it was probably written in the early part of the 1720s:

> Nota that of old, all those of any publict spirit in the parioch specially the gentlemen conveened upon St Stephens day if lawfull, and failzeing therof the next lawfull day at the Knock of Alves, with their best horse and armes, and ran there races westward two miles and a half of distance ending at the Kairne of Kilbuyack.

The mention that the men were carrying their 'armes', although they were simply running a race, might be a trace of another custom carried on on that day, namely the hunting of an animal as was the case in Ireland and in England for instance.[13]

Turning now to Norway, we have there a most remarkable example of horse-races with a strong symbolic aspect:

> This Christmas custom, in Norwegian tradition, was usually called the *second day's skeid* [horse-race]. In older times the custom had two main forms which were connected. On one hand, on the 26th of December (second Christmas Day) people rode in procession around the district, from farm to farm, in order to receive hospitality, especially beer. On the other hand, early in the morning of the second Christmas Day, people rode or drove out to water the horses in so-called *fro-brunnar*, special springs or special places at rivers or lakes. There were springs which never froze, or openings in the ice which kept open throughout the winter. The water in these springs was thought to be especially powerful and health giving. When the horses got to drink this water on the morning of the second Christmas Day, they were supposed to thrive and become especially healthy. People competed to come first to the springs, for then the water was thought to be the best. The competitions often turned into fights. (Solheim, 1956: 152-153).

We are here in the presence of such a collection of elements that it is important to go through them in detail, if not in the order of the text itself. First, the time at which the horses are driven – raced – to these special wells: Solheim writes 'early in the morning', and we can safely assume that it was in fact before sunrise, as was the prescription for humans on the first of May for instance. Second, and even more

[13] 'On St Stephen's day [in Ireland] something must be hunted, a deer, a fox, a hare, or the wren; formerly it was a great day for cockfighting.' (Kinahan,1881: 108) Henderson reports the same for England (1879: 67): 'St Stephen's Day in Cleveland, as indeed all England over, is devoted to hunting and shooting, it being held that the game-laws are not in force on that day'. I find interesting the idea that the normal hunting laws were not operative on St Stephen's Day, while, on Michaelmas it was allowed to steal one's neighbour's horse. The suspension of normal laws is a defining trait of special, sacred days or periods of time, the carnival period being the best known example of that interruption in the normal order of things.

reminiscent of the May practices that were dealt with in relations to humans, the water was 'thought to be best' for the first one that drank of it. Although getting the 'cream of the well' is not mentioned in these exact terms here, what happened with the horses is too similar not to belong to the same area of beliefs. Third is an omission: although we are told that the horses that got to drink the water of the special springs 'were supposed to thrive and become especially healthy', the 'yearly' dimension of the protection has been omitted. I think that this dimension was nonetheless present, if only because of the yearly occurrence of that particular race – the effects of all the practices of the 26 December were expected to last until the same next festival. These three observations all concern the prophylactic powers held by the water of 'special springs' at a particular time of the year. It is interesting to find them in relation to horses, and in relation to that particular date.[14]

There is more. We read that the races belonging to the Norwegian Christmas traditions are called *skeid*, a term that translates as 'horse-race'. In his article, Svale Solheim deals with horse-races in the course of the whole year, which leads him to address the subject of summer gatherings, the sæter-gatherings.[15] These, in essence, are the equivalent of the St Michael's festivities in the Hebrides – with, among other traits, the same role played by certain kinds of food. He proposes an analysis of the link between the races and gatherings which contends that: 'it is easily seen that the constituent features of the *skeid* are the same as those of the sæter-gatherings, and that one cannot but conclude that it is a question of one and the same festival or, in any case, of a similar institution having the same original aim.' (1956: 33) This original aim consisted in ensuring general abundance of wealth and health, for people, their crops, and their animals.

Finally, the last element of Solheim's account of the 'second Christmas' Day' races to deserve attention is his comment on the processional riding from farm to farm. He further expands on that aspect, quoting a teacher's unpublished writings on the *rida just* (riding around) performed on the 26 December, in the region of Inner Nordfjord (on the western coast) until the 1890s:[16]

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[14] Van Gennep noted that St Stephen – St Etienne – was, 'God knows why', considered the patron saint of horses in France (1999 [1958], vol. 3: 2750). In the Hebrides, this role was ascribed to St Michael (Carmichael, 1900-1971, vol. 3: 142).

[15] '[The] sæter-gatherings were, from olden times, clearly connected with the gathering of the summer's produce at the sæter, and with the haymaking which took place at the same time. ... Sæter celebrations of this kind have evidently been a regular institution [at Valdres and its vicinity, in Norway]. It is said that they generally occurred in August, at *Larsok* (St Lawrence's wake), i. e. during or shortly after haymaking time on the fells.' (Solheim 1956: 8) St Lawrence's Day falls on the 10 August.

[16] The teacher, Lars Søreide, wrote this in 1950, commenting that the people did not know the meaning of this custom any longer, considering it only 'an ancient form of Christmas fun.' (Solheim 1956: 154)

> Early in the morning of the 26th December the horse must be given fodder and groomed. He was to be taken out for a ride. All the work horses on the farm were to take part in it. The servants and young boys should '*rida just*', first and foremost the servants. Then they rode around the farm, at a trot and, many times, at a gallop past each man's cow-shed and stable-door. Then they rode to the neighbouring farms and made the same circuit there. Often they were stopped outside one or another cottage door. The master of the house invited them to taste the Christmas beer. They often brought spirits with them from home. (Solheim 1956: 153).

This circuiting of the farms shows well the ritual character of the custom, underneath the 'Christmas fun': we are confronted here again with the 'circling' of a place, as in the Hebridean circling of Michael's churchyard, or of the 'Hill of Angels'.

The two parts of St Stephen's Day customs, as Solheim put it – the race to a well and the house-visiting – is, very interestingly, described in a folk ballad from the Swedish-speaking area of Finland. It belongs to a corpus of so-called 'Stephen ballads', singing the miracles that happened at King Herod's table on the night Christ was born.[17] In these ballads, St Stephen appears often as a servant, but in one sub-group, he is 'cast' as Herod's stable-groom. The ballad runs thus (Seeman *et al.*, eds, 1967: 183):

(2) To water went Stephen with five foals in hand
– Fast then to him should we hold –
And Herod the King, he ruled in all the land.
– Let Stephen be our trusted guide and our helmsman bold.
(...)

(16) If now in this house St Stephen's buns are too few,
Knock your chimney-stack, that is what we'll do.

(17) And if there's no trick that we better can play,
Why then we will carry each stone clean away.

(18) But if of the soup there is enough us to fill,
– Fast then to him should we hold –
Then praised be our host, and praised his good will.
– Let Stephen be our trusted guide and our helmsman bold.

[17] These ballads are found in Scandinavia, from Denmark to Finland, in the Faroe Islands, in Great Britain, and in Slovenia. Only in Sweden (and Swedish-speaking areas), however, do the ballads involving Stephen as a groom seem to have been recorded. See Seeman *et al.*, eds, 1967: 182-183. See also an article by Dag Strömbäck (1968) in which he rejects the possibility of a pre-Christian origin of the 'Stephen as a groom' sub-group of ballads. In the light of all the material that has been discussed so far, this does not represent a defensible position any longer.

(19) Thanks be to you in this your house,
Here we have had a fine carouse.
Join with us, brothers, to make merry here,
Christmas comes but once in a year.
Fal-la-la-ral-la-la-ral-lal-lay.

The 'fine carouse' evoked in the ballad serves to stress the New Year, carnivalesque character of the custom. The Scottish practice of 'guising', which saw groups of boys, or young men, going round houses performing plays on Hogmanay, represents but one instance of the same group of customs associated with that time of the year.[18]

The next set of customs related to St Stephen's Day that I would like to deal with now, concerns the practice of 'killing the wren'.

'The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
On St Stephen's day is caught in the furzes...'
... On St Stephen's day men and children turn out to hunt and kill the wren.
(Kinahan 1881: 108)

Although I am aware that the link between horse-racing and killing the wren may seem obscure at this stage, I hope to be able to clarify this point in the following paragraphs. My aim is to show that the custom of killing an animal might be used to propose an explanation for the belief that St Stephen's day was the day on which it was recommended to bleed horses, in Scotland and elsewhere. This, in turn, is I think related to the ritual aspect of the races involving the use of water.

In an article on wren tales and rituals in Irish tradition, (1996-1997, 64-65: 131-160), Sylvie Muller develops the thesis that the killing of the wren on St Stephen's Day corresponded to the yearly sacrifice man had to offer to the forces of nature in order to pay his debt to them. Young men, usually bachelors, went round the houses with the dead wren, asking for food and drink, and some money to bury the bird. They sang the 'wren song' (the first two lines of which are quoted above) from which it emerges that 'the wren ritual was understood to ensure fertility and prosperity for the community for the coming year' (1996-1997: 144).[19] When I

[18] It is worth mentioning here the Welsh *Mari Lwyd*, custom performed at the same period, which involved 'a horse skull draped in a sheet [and] carried from house to house accompanied by a group of men, one of whom operates the horse'. (Wood 1997: 164) The people inside the visited house compete, by means of verses, with the visiting men from the outside, then the horse figure is invited in, and in effect crosses the boundary between the two spheres. An extremely liminal character is attributed to the horse, a character that will be explored below.

[19] 'We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year/ With your pockets full of money and your cellar full of beer!' Quoted from the Irish Folklore Collection (1088: 69, co. Clare) in Muller (1996-1997: 144).

mention that the young men in the procession were always disguised, the carnivalesque character of the custom will become quite apparent.[20]

What is also very interesting for us in the wren practices is the fact that the tales tell of the wren's debt to Nature that is to be repaid with his blood. Muller lists several categories of these tales, in which the wren contracts a debt towards Nature associated principally with his regal status or the borrowing of food/grain. The wren offers himself to clear the debt, with the corollary effect that his kin is then allowed to survive and breed. The sacrificial aspect is extremely obvious, and it might be used to help bring out that same character in the Norwegian processions, *via* the Stephen ballad quoted earlier. The sacrifice of the wren (which represents Man) stands not only for the payment of a debt, by definition something that was contracted in the past, but also for the advance payment, or rather contribution to the crop to come, and to the animals to be born to the farm (see Muller 1996-1997: 149).[21] The visitors stood for 'Nature', and the gift of food, and/or money from the village's households represented the latter's participation towards the payment of the debt. The reciprocal aspect of the custom can be seen in some Irish wren songs, as well as in the Finnish ballad. In some lines of the wren songs, the positive side of this exchange between men and Nature is given: 'And may you be seven times better off around this time again'.[22] In the ballad, however, the negative side is presented, in which the visitors threaten to destroy the house if they are not given what they have come for. In other words, if the 'debt' to Nature is not paid, poverty will likely ensue, brought on by the provoked barrenness of the land.

The concept of sacrifice seems also to be present in the custom of bleeding the horses. Naogeorgus (d. 1577), a pseudonym for Thomas Kirchmeyer, belonged to the tradition of the early Protestant authors who wrote about the superstitious practices condoned, if not practised, by the Catholic Church. This had the beneficial effect for contemporary researchers, of preserving traditions that had been merely incorporated by the Church, and were presumably of much older origin. We have seen this happening with the practices around healing wells, and it worked in the same manner for other areas of popular culture. This is what Naogeorgus/Kirchmeyer wrote about St Stephen's Day practices (Hope [ed.] 1880: f. 45):

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[20] One of the costumes Muller cites is that of a 'hobby-horse', which she finds 'unlikely in the Irish context, in Kerry' (1996-1997: 144). It is probably impossible to find a satisfactory link to the horse-races and ridings taking place on the same day in Norway, but I found the occurrence, and Muller's comment, thought-provoking.

[21] Although Muller does not mention it, a third dimension was probably also present, namely that the sacrifice was a way to oblige the preternatural forces to answer in kind, as it were, with good crops, etc. – as was developed in the case of healing ritual (Chapter 3).

[22] Quoted from the Irish Folklore Collection (1013: 308, co. Clare) in Muller (1996-1997: 144).

> Then followeth Saint Stephens day, whereon doth every man,
> His horses iaunt and course abrode, as swiftly as he can.
> Untill they doe extreemely sweate, and than they let them blood,
> For this being done upon this day, they say doth do them good,
> And keepes them from all maladies and sicknesse through the yeare,
> As if that Steven any time took charge of horses heare.

This extract is particularly remarkable for it places together the racing of horses and their subsequent bleeding, which recalls the Norwegian races to a 'special spring'; in the same manner as horses were believed to obtain yearly protection from a drink of water at a sacred spring, this was likewise accomplished by bleeding them. The yearly character of this practice, as much as the date at which it occurred, made it a ritual one – not simply a veterinary act. It seems likely that a gift was offered to the Norwegian spring in exchange for the powers of its water, as was the case when humans visited healing wells in order to get their health back.

However St Stephen's patronage of horses happened, it was accepted in France where St Stephen's Day was also the prescribed date to bleed horses. Writing over a century after Naogeorgus, from the opposite religious stand-point, the French abbot Jean-Baptiste Thiers noted in his *Traité des superstitions*, that some people still believed 'that it is much better to graft trees on the day of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, and bleed horses on the day of the Festival of St Stephen, than on any other day.' (1679: 270; my translation)[23]

It is perhaps no more than a coincidence – if a striking one – that two festivals in honour of the saint used to be celebrated in France. The other one was held at the beginning of August, namely on the 3rd, and was said to correspond to the day of the lapidation of the saint. The recovery of the saint's body, or 'Invention' of the saint, was apparently celebrated with such piety that his festival was moved to the 26th of December.[24]

There is little evidence of what took place on St Stephen's Day in France, but what survives, thanks to Van Gennep, compares well with the material gathered so far:

> On the day of the festival of St Stephen, patron saint of the place at Saint-Saturnin, near Apt, all work is stopped; races take place: the old men receive a cap as prize, asses, horses and mules win pewter trays. The one able to trace the straightest furrow also wins a pewter dish. ...

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[23] '[Croire] qu'il vaut bien mieux enter ou greffer des arbres le jour de l'Annonciation de la Vierge, et saigner des chevaux le jour de la Feste de S. Estienne, qu'à tout autre jour.'
[24] See Van Gennep 1999 [1958], vol. 3: 2747.

> That wake on the night of St Stephen was very important in the Thônes valley; the young men had to bring foodstuffs and drink, and also to give a present to their good friend or their official fiancée.[25] (Van Gennep 1999 [1958], vol. 3: 2749; my translation)

While the last part of the quotation shows a manifest resemblance to the Norwegian custom of the *støylshans* (where the young men reciprocated on St Stephen's Day, the presents they had received from the girls during the summer), it is interesting to note that the old men were the ones who seemed involved in the races.

Further on, Van Gennep mentions that in Savoie (in the east), 'St Stephen's Day was the day to ... tend to the animals so that they would remain in good health the whole coming year' (id.).[26] Unfortunately, he does not give any detail as to what the tending consisted of, but the belief existed nonetheless.

The link, in France, between that particular date and the concept of fecundity of the land is met with in the city of Lyons, in its cathedral dedicated to Stephen. There, candles were offered on this day to the statue of *Ferrabo* – whose characteristics were those of a pre-Christian goddess of abundance – in order to secure wealth for the coming year.[27]

Although the evidence for France is not very detailed, there is enough to show that some kind of celebration existed on St Stephen's Day, sometimes involving horse-races, sometimes the bleeding of horses, and sometimes offerings to a cornucopia-type of deity.

Conclusion

If we consider the evidence we have at our disposal as a whole, we are in the presence of a cluster of concepts and activities centred on a fertility ritual and involving the use of horses to perform part of that ritual. The manifestations of the custom have developed differently according to the location, but a central one

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[25] 'Le jour de la fête de saint Etienne, patron du lieu à Saint-Saturnin près d'Apt, les travaux sont suspendus; des courses sont disputées: les vieillards reçoivent comme prix un bonnet, les ânes, les chevaux et les mulets gagnent des plats d'étain. Celui qui trace le sillon le plus droit gagne aussi un plat d'étain. ... / Cette veillée du soir de la Saint-Etienne était très importante dans la vallée de Thônes; c'était aux garçons d'apporter victuailles et boisson mais aussi de faire un cadeau à leur bonne amie ou à leur fiancée officielle.'

[26] 'C'est le jour de la Saint-Etienne qu'il faut ... soigner les bêtes afin qu'elles se portent bien toute l'année'.

[27] See Van Gennep 1999 [1958], vol. 3: 2748. In northern Portugal, purification rites still take place on St Stephen's Day as well, involving notably the blessing by the priest of food brought by the villagers (Santa Montez 1999: 141).

emerges featuring a horse-race to a source of water, and this water is then administered to the animal in the form of a drink or a bath.

In Scotland, Ireland, France and Scandinavia, the structure of the central 'event' corresponds, if the dates appear not to. However, it seems that the discrepancy, or wide range of dates for the performing of the custom, is only superficial. Indeed, the Irish, French and Scottish material relating to a yearly ritual horse-racing is associated with the season of harvest, in August and September. In Scandinavia, the 'second Christmas Day' races represent the winter equivalents to the summer gatherings, which also bear a strong relation to harvest.

What the Scandinavian evidence brings forward as well is the particular date of the 26 December, St Stephen's Day. It is the day for bleeding the horses and killing the wren: the day of the acknowledgement that men need Nature for their sustenance, which translates into sacrificial offerings being given to Nature or its representatives.

However, it seems to me that there is more to the ritual races than we have already discussed here. Certainly, all the races described above, be they on St Stephen's day, or on St Michael's Day, and the peripheral customs associated with these days, comprise all the elements underlined above – the yearly protection of the horse, the fertility ritual, the carnival aspect – yet there is another dimension to these practices that lies with the nature of horses. To be exact, there exists a connection between the creature 'horse' and the 'element' water, which refers to to a different level of symbolism. In his seminal work on symbols, productions of the imagination and their interpretations, Gilbert Durand showed that the horse is an isomorphic figure of darkness and hell, 'linked either with aquatic constellations, or with thunder, or with the underworld' (1984 [1969]: 78); it is also, whatever its cosmic associations, a symbol for the passing of time.[28] Definitely a plural symbol, the horse is associated indifferently with the sun and the moon – as the movement of both can illustrate the course of time – and with this world and the Otherworld, either chthonian or aquatic. Durand thus describes its relationship with water:

> The aquatic horse seems to us to be also derived from the underworld horse. Not only because the same scheme of movement is suggested by running water, leaping waves and the fast racer ... but the horse is furthermore associated with water because of the terrifying and hell-like character of aquatic abyss. (pp. 82-83; my translation)[29]

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[28] '[Le cheval est]en liaison soit avec des constellations aquatiques, soit avec le tonnerre, soit avec les enfers'.

[29] 'Le cheval aquatique nous semble également se réduire au cheval infernal. Non seulement parce que le même schème de mouvement est suggéré par l'eau courante, les vagues bondissantes et le rapide coursier ... mais encore le cheval est associé à l'eau à cause du caractère terrifiant et infernal de l'abîme aquatique'.

This symbiotic association of the horse with water is illustrated in Greek mythology in relation to the birth of Pegasus, and in Irish mythology with the Grey of Macha. In the case of Pegasus, two traditions co-exist; one has it that Pegasus was born *from* a spring, while in the other, he was born from the blood of Medusa's severed head.[30] In the Irish tradition, Cúchulain captures and tames the Grey of Macha as the horse was emerging from a lake. Both horses, through their extraordinary origins and their dual nature (even triple for Pegasus, the *winged* horse) are clearly liminal creatures, belonging to the human and supernatural worlds. Associating this element of sacred with the qualities of normal, real horses as a fast means of transport, we can see how the horse would have taken on the function of archetypal messenger between the preternatural and the real worlds. One more aspect of the myth of Pegasus is the way he came to be tamed by Bellerophon. The wild Pegasus could only be subdued by a bridle that Athena sent to Bellorophon. In that sense, '[by] imposing the bridle upon Pegasus, [Bellerophon] becomes the mythical founder of the domestication of the horse.' (Sergent 1999: 218; my translation)[31]

The general association of horse with water, and especially the last point mentioned about the taming of Pegasus, both have a particular resonance with the Scottish material involving the supernatural waterhorse. As we will see in the next three chapters, the waterhorse embodies not only the supernatural forces ever present in the Scottish landscape, but also, through the oral narrative medium of legendry, it occupies a very important role in maintaining and transmitting social structures and ethical codes.

[30] See Sergent 1999: 219.

[31] '[En] imposant le mors à Pégase [Bellérophon] devient le fondateur mythique de la domestication du cheval'. Sergent gives references to the Greek texts.

SECTION THREE

LEGENDS AND BELIEFS OF THE WATERHORSE

CHAPTER 6

PORTRAITS AND NARRATIVES OF THE WATERHORSE

Introduction

In the last two chapters, I have examined the archetypal association between horse and water, and also the ritual role assigned to both in the renewal of the year. These two components, the horse and water, are found elsewhere in Scottish tradition, literally linked, in the legendary figure of the waterhorse. The legends in which the waterhorse appears are found not only in Scotland, but also in Ireland, Scandinavia and continental Northern Europe, although outside Scotland the waterhorse does not seem to present such a variety of shapes and stories, regardless of the genre they belong to: migratory legends, memorates, or folktales.

Apart from its equine appearance as a beautiful pony or a horse, the waterhorse can also transform itself into a dark handsome young man, or even into an old hag. The narratives associated with these various shapes run along different lines. For instance, the waterhorse as handsome man is met predominantly in stories relating the abduction of a girl, while the pony character is concerned mostly with children; as a workhorse, it can be incredibly strong and indefatigable, pulling carts carrying heavy loads of stones or peat. Their common characteristic, which allows us to recognise all these stories as being 'waterhorse stories', is found at the end of the narratives: the waterhorse, in the shape of a horse, plunges back into its loch, alone or carrying off its victim(s) on its back.

The large geographical range across which the creature is to be found, together with the variety and number of narratives related to it, contribute to make it necessary to provide, or attempt to provide, a new system of classification for all these items, in both national and international contexts. However, before a classification system can be devised, we will first need to address a problem of definition, which results from the different names given to the waterhorse, from *each uisge* and kelpie in Scotland, to *Nykur* in parts of the North-East Atlantic area.[1] Then, in the second part of the chapter, the sources for the corpus of Scottish narratives that are assembled in Appendix 2 will be presented and discussed.

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[1] It should be noted here that the expression 'North-East Atlantic area' is used, in our particular context, to designate an area comprising Ireland, the Faroe Islands and Iceland to the West and the North, and Norway and Sweden to the East. 'Nordic' will be used as the adjective, again for practical reasons, as well as stylistic ones.

Part 1 – The creature, its names and credibility: portraits of the waterhorse

Although the name 'waterhorse' describes clearly the dual nature of the subject – a terrestrial animal living in water – it does not reveal how complex a creature it is, nor does it indicate its power to change its appearance. The waterhorse stands out among supernatural beings because it can assume various shapes: in Scotland, it was said to be able to transform itself into a handsome young man, a hag, a beautiful horse or pony, and some accounts even describe it as a bird, a boat, or a dog. The one factor that all these embodiments have in common, and which allows us to know that we are dealing with a waterhorse, is that, at the end of the story, it transforms and plunges back into the loch or river it came out of in its original horse shape.

Waterhorses are typically freshwater creatures, living, as I just mentioned, in rivers and in lochs. In Scottish Gaelic, they are called *eich uisge* or 'waterhorses' – which is a literal equivalent; *each* (pl. *eich*): horse, and *uisge*: water – and kelpies, or even water kelpies. Some authors distinguish between the *each uisge* and the kelpie, arguing that they are two different creatures, and basing the distinction on their habitat and/or their deeds. I would like here to develop this matter, as it is symptomatic, first of the complexity of the nature of the beast, and second of its integration into the popular *imaginaire*, and thence into other aspects of social life.

In 1885, a Scottish minister, the Reverend Alexander Stewart, differentiated between 'water-horse' and 'water kelpy' according to their provenance. Kelpies, found both in the south and in the Highlands of Scotland, are identical in both areas, 'half human, half demoniac', though their habitat differs slightly: 'In the south the kelpy is an inhabitant indifferently of rivers and lakes, while in the Highlands he is almost always associated with solitary rivers ..., or with those deep dark eddying cauldron pools that mountain torrents so frequently scoop out for themselves...' (Stewart 1885: 40). By contrast, the waterhorse is supposed to live exclusively in the Highlands. Here I will quote Stewart again, for he conveys well the idea of power and unstable nature associated with waterhorses in folk narratives:

> [The water-horse and water-bull] are painted on that tablet of the popular mind consecrated to superstition, as, upon the whole, of the same shape and form as the more kindly quadrupeds after whom they have been named, but larger, fiercer, and with an amount of 'devilment' and cunning about them of which the latter fortunately manifests no trace. They are always fat and sleek, and so full of strength, and spirit, and life, that the neighing of the one and the bellowing of the other frequently awake the mountain echoes to their inmost recesses for miles and miles around. The habitation of the

> water-horse ... is ... the solitary inland lakes and dark mountain tarns. (1885: 40-41)

To sum up Stewart's view, both the kelpie and the waterhorse live in fresh water, but the former can assume a human form and is found all over Scotland in rivers, although in the south it dwells in lakes as well. As for the latter, there is no indication that it appears as anything else than a horse dwelling in pools and lakes in the Highlands. We can see that Stewart's attempt to be exact in his description of what he calls elsewhere 'a very absurd article of superstitious belief' (1885: 40) only leads to a confused image of what exactly kelpies and waterhorses are, and of where either can be found. Some years later, another Scottish author, John Gregorson Campbell, endorsed Stewart's definitions, and defined further characteristics:

> The Kelpie that swells torrents and devours women and children has no representative in Gaelic superstition. Some writers speak as if the Water-horse were to be identified with it, but the two animals are distinctly separate. The Water-horse haunts lochs, the Kelpie streams and torrents. The former is never accused of swelling torrents any more than of causing any other natural phenomenon, nor of taking away children, unless perhaps when wanted to silence a refractory child. (1900: 215)

It seems possible that Campbell based his description of kelpies on an earlier source,[2] which he then combined with the view defended by Stewart. It nonetheless is slightly surprising, since material gathered in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland towards the end of the nineteenth century clearly shows otherwise.[3] More recently, Ronald Black perpetuated this perception of two different animals. His proposition is that:

> The *each uisge* of Highland tradition comes out from behind the reeds and water-lilies of shallow upland lochans to wheedle young women and children into the otherworld, sometimes helping men with their ploughing before turning nasty. As a seducer of young women, it changes shape into a handsome man. When abducting children, it is an affectionate Highland pony whose back gets longer and longer as more and more children climb aboard.

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[2] Campbell's use of the phrase 'swells torrents and devours women and children' could be referring to an 1806 publication by Patrick Graham, minister of Aberfoyle, who wrote: 'Every lake had its kelpie, or water horse, often seen by the Sheperd, as he sat in a summer's evening, upon the brow of a rock, dashing along the surface of the deep, or browsing on the pasture ground, on its verge. Often did this malignant genius of the waters allure women and children to his subaqueous haunts, there to be immediately devoured. A most disastrous event of this kind is still current in tradition concerning the water-horse of Lochvenachar. Often did he also swell the torrent or lake, beyond its usual limits, to overwhelm the hapless traveller in the flood.' (pp. 104-105)

[3] I am here specifically referring to the collection of folklore assembled in the Maclagan Mss, which will be discussed alongside other sources in the second part of this chapter.

> The 'kelpie' of Lowland tradition probably derives from a Pictish or Strathclyde-British word meaning, again, 'water-horse'.[4] It lives in great tumbling rivers, plagues millers, drowns people in the dark, and is never friendly. (Macille Dhuibh: 1999a)

This perspective is also problematic because there are accounts of kelpies in the Highlands, and of waterhorses coming out of rivers.

We can see that there are serious discrepancies between all these sources – Is a kelpie half human (Stewart) or a horse (Black)? And is a waterhorse harmless (Campbell) or fierce and nasty (Stewart and Black)? If they confirm the ever-changing essence of the creature, such inconsistencies nonetheless lead us to doubt the nature, and even the existence, of two separate beings. In fact, it is difficult to find anything to substantiate such a position when we compare these definitions with the narratives themselves. Thus, not only does one find that kelpies can be found in lochs, but also that waterhorses are indeed famous for carrying children and women into the water to devour them (see types F68; F58.B); and conversely, kelpies sometimes help men without necessarily harming them (F94.B). On purely logical grounds, it does seem a little strange that the two Scottish cultures to which Black alludes would have created a similar supernatural creature but with very different attributes. This approach does not seem to be taking into account the oral narrative medium in which waterhorses appear. As Alan Bruford remarked: 'migratory legends of the supernatural seem to cross linguistic boundaries even more easily than *Märchen*, and many if not most of them can be found in both languages of Scotland.' (1980: 51) Furthermore, we can see that this phenomenon had in fact been previously noted by the self-titled 'mythologist' Alexander MacBain, a collector from Inverness who worked with John Francis Campbell to gather folk narratives mainly in the Western Isles. For him, the identity of kelpie and waterhorse was never in question:

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[4] The 'water' element does not seem to be inherent to the word 'kelpie', the etymology of which has given rise to numerous suggestions. Thus, the *Scottish National Dictionary* gives as the possible origin of 'kelpie': 'Probably ad. Gael. *cailpeach*, *colpach*, a bullock, colt.' It seems worthwhile also to compare this with the first and last definitions of 'Kelp' (a Scots word also found in the form 'kelpie'): 'a mischievous young person'; and 'a well-grown young animal' (this comparison will be more fully explored below). Yet another possibility was advanced by E. W. B. Nicholson in his *Golspie*, where he contended that 'kelpie' 'is obviously derived from *kilpe*, *kilp*, or *kelp*, a name of various kind of seaweed. ... That again is obviously the Middle English *kelp* or *kilp* 'scabbard', preserved in the name 'kelp-pigeon' or 'sheathbill'. One of the commonest of our seaweeds is the very image of a pointed mediaeval scabbard, and doubtless from this, when the meaning 'scabbard' became extinct, the name spread to other varieties.' (1897: 332) Although this etymology does not seem to have satisfied other scholars, the association of waterhorse with seaweed nonetheless exists, albeit in a much more literal way. Indeed the presence of algae in the mane of the waterhorse is very often used as the sign by which it is recognised as such.

> The word 'kelpie', as Mr Campbell says, is not Gaelic. It is doubtless a derivative from the root of *calf* in English and the German *kalb*. The Gaelic word for kelpie is 'each-uisge', water-horse.[5]

For their part, the people who tell the stories, and presumably their audiences as well, often seem to take the two names as being synonymous.[6]

The ever-changing personality of the waterhorse is very much part of the Faroese tradition, which has been studied by Jóan Pauli Joensen. There, 'The nix is a fresh-water being that lives on the bed of a lake. It can appear in rivers, lakes, or on land near a lake, in a variety of shapes – such as a beautiful horse or young man – to attract human beings, especially girls.'[7] (1999: 89) It seems worth noting now, though I will come back on this point later, that there is in the Faroe Islands, a clear proof of the 'migratory' nature of the waterhorse legends. On the one hand, the ability of the creature to transform itself into a young man links it with Scotland; while on the other hand, its name, *Nykur*, is also found in Iceland. Interestingly, the name *Nykur* seems to carry in itself associations with the diverse shapes the creature can assume. Davíð Erlingsson, in an article examining Icelandic supernatural water beings, commented on the unusual character of the name, as 'Icelandic tradition appears not to know of the possibility of supernatural beings with generic names that begin with n-, such as *nykur*' (1999: 73). However, he argues that this apparent contradiction between the term and its meaning can be explained by its relation to a stylistic figure, called '*nykrað*', which is 'the technical term for "mixed metaphor(s)" in poetry.' (p. 76) He then concludes that 'this *nykrað*-figure works in the same way as the *nykur* itself, shifting its shape in many ways.'[8] (p. 77) Indeed, the narratives gathered in Appendix 2 reflect the variety of guises the waterhorse could adopt – a

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[5] CW 136; published in *Highland News*, 5 January 1885, in an article entitled: 'Highland Stories and Superstitions – Leaves from a mythologist's note-book'.

[6] See for instance the account of Mr A. MacMillan, from Arran, who said 'that the water horse was known in Arran, but went generally under the name of kelpie.' (Maclagan Mss: 6795; Appendix 2 – F4.A.20). More recent examples comprise statements like: 'All over the North, stories are told about the water horse kelpie, or "each uisge". This dreaded beast is reputed to be able to lure the unsuspecting to their doom, either by fascination or by its wonderful electro-magnetic powers.' (Roberston 1964: 91-92) See also in the part on children narratives in the next chapter, the quotation from author Margaret Bennett's mother, Peigi, who was brought up on Skye.

[7] Joensen uses the term 'nix' in place of 'Nykur', and not in its original meaning to designate the German waterhorse. This reference to the German supernatural being is slightly confusing because it appears, from the material to which he refers in his article, that the Faroese stories present in fact traits that link them very clearly with Ireland and Scotland on the one hand, and with Iceland and Scandinavia on the other.

[8] This mixed, dual, nature may perhaps be considered in parallel with the ambiguity that exists in the Scottish word 'kelp', as proposed above. The *Icelandic-English Dictionary* gives a similar indication: 'The nykr is the Proteus of the Northern tales, and takes many shapes, whence the gramm. term *nykrat*, part. ... a change in a figure of speech.'

variety that will become even more apparent when we try to organise the stories in the last part of this chapter.

Underlying the issue of the diverse names and representations of the waterhorse is the question of the belief in the waterhorse, or rather, of its place in the Scottish system of beliefs. This recalls the subject of belief in supernatural forces in general, as it was discussed in regard to the healing and liminal properties of water in previous chapters. The conclusion that we drew then, namely that neither the advent of a monotheistic religion nor scientific progress ever managed to rid nature entirely of powers of its own, whatever the manifestation of these powers, applies here too. Strictly speaking, accepting the existence of God represents a similar process to that of accepting the existence of preternatural creatures.[9] By treating the existence of the waterhorse as a given, not to be questioned or judged, it becomes easier to extract the intrinsic value of the legends, without being distracted by side issues such as people's credulity or 'superstitions'. In other words, it matters little whether scientifically such an animal exists or not; what is important is that it was *said* to exist – we are, after all, dealing here with *oral* narratives.

Some of the justifications for the belief in its existence seem to partake of an established oral narrative's strategy, in which the waterhorse is presented anchored in the real world and so rendered less extra-ordinary:

> On the divided state of opinion as to whether there is really such a thing as a water horse in existence, [the reciter] said that few people seem now to believe in it, but for his own part, he is rather inclined to think it may be, for he often heard old people saying that there is a creature in the water corresponding to every kind of creature that can be found on land. (Maclagan Mss: 8792 [from Ebenezer Munro, Embo, Dornoch]; see Appendix 2 – F4.A.8).

Dismissing such comments as merely showing credulity and naivety would be, I think, missing their point.[10] In a story-telling situation, the possibility of the existence

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[9] Ann-Mari Häggman met this situation while doing fieldwork in Finland when an informant told her that he had once seen a water-sprite, and added that: 'It says in the Scriptures that there are both wood-sprites, water-sprites and goblins and other such fellows. You can read about them in the Scriptures...'. Upon verifying what exactly the man meant by 'Scriptures', she discovered that he was talking of a catechism dated from 1689 that the old minister of his parish had kept using until 1920, although it was forbidden. In it you could still read how 'seeking assistance from the devil and his agents, such as witches, sooth-sayers, wood-sprites, water-sprites, goblins and such like' was committing idolatry (1999: 84).

[10] The following remark shows well that some bearers of this tradition were very aware of the need to keep up appearances; after having told his interviewer several times that he did not believe in such a creature as the waterhorse, Donald Campbell added: 'But it isn't good for us to spoil it, we must say that such a thing existed; it doesn't do well for us to spoil the thing.' (SA1953.117.A6; Appendix 2 – F4.B.43) Although this comment is posterior by over fifty years to the extracts from the Maclagan

of the waterhorse would act as a prerequisite to the validation of the different points the narratives make. This appears very clearly in the way the following example of a legend is constructed. The legend itself only starts once 'plausibility' settings have been established – the implication being that the event described must/could have happened exactly as the reciter reported it.

> F58.A.10 *Woman near Loch Liatach*
> The reciter's views regarding the water horse are here reproduced as nearly as possible in his own words. He said:
> I have often heard of water horses, but I don't know whether there is such a thing in it, but the picture of them is in books, and you would think some body must have seen them before the picture could be put in a book. At any rate, there was a story about one that was in Loch Liatach. One time a woman was sitting outside at the wall of her house (*tot an tighe*). Her house was not far from the loch, and a man whom she did not know came forward, and sat down beside her. She thought there was something suspicious looking about him, and wanted to get away from him, but thought it safer to act cautiously, so she worked slowly, and bit by bit, till she got herself free, but just as she got up to escape, he changed into the appearance of a horse, and ran down into the loch, and was out of her sight in no time. (Maclagan Mss: 8118-8119; from Mr Maclean, Criochan, Barra)

Such a necessity, namely to present supernatural beings, here the waterhorse, as part of the 'normal' world in which human beings live, is inherent to the nature of legends. In Max Lüthi's words, legends are told to 'draw attention to events that are extraordinary or remarkable; they are intended to shock or to teach a lesson.' (1986 [1947]: 2) What better way is there to shock than to juxtapose elements, some of which are perfectly anodine, with others that contrast sharply? The story quoted above illustrates this very well: the 'shock' factor comes from the intrusion of a known supernatural being, the waterhorse, into the normal world of the woman – and not from the creature itself.[11] As to the teaching of a lesson, this practical use of legends will be discussed in relation to different types in the following two chapters, particularly in relation to diverse aspects of social institutions, and moral and religious prescriptions.

Another indication of the extent to which waterhorses were integrated into the psyche of local populations is given in the following extract:

> F4.C.1 *Family of kelpies in the Reay Country*

Mss quoted here, I think that the 'ethics' of story-telling would have been the same, and the desire to preserve the 'belief' just as acute.

[11] This reflection on a specific worldview in which the two worlds should not interact will be further discussed below.

> A native of the County of Sutherland said that there was a family of kelpies at one time in the Reay Country. Their father was an ordinary man, but their mother was of the Bean nighidh kind. The reciter says that he himself saw some that were descended from them. They were working at the Highland Railway, and were as respectable as other people. (Maclagan Mss: 7323)

This rather astonishing, yet almost dryly factual, story calls for some commentary. Firstly, we have here a perfect example of the ordinariness people attached to the presence of kelpies. They undoubtedly formed a part of the collective subconsciousness, which could perhaps explain the fact that their narratives touched so many different aspects of life. Secondly, it has to be noted that the *bean nighidh*, the Gaelic name of the Washer Woman, was sometimes spoken of as a kelpie in Scottish instances, although this association seems to have sprung from the relation of both figures with water and death – caused by the waterhorse; announced by the *bean nighidh* – rather than from their representing the same entity. Lastly, it brings to mind the sealwoman stories, in which a man has children with a sealwoman whose skin was taken from her.

I hope that this contextualisation will have helped to stress not only the importance of the stories, but also their moving, living character within a community. This aspect is especially important to bear in mind, as the classification issues we are going to deal with now inevitably tend to hold the narratives in one place, and cut them off from their story-telling environment.

Part 2 – Sources, definitions and classification systems: the narratives

Before going on to examine the stories in terms of classification, I would like to introduce the sources from which they were extracted.

The sources of the waterhorse narratives that appear in the corpus presented in Appendix 2 can be divided into three main categories, depending on the nature of the medium. First are the manuscripts, then the published stories, and, lastly, the recordings of interviews made for, and kept in, the Sound Archive of the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh (formerly the School of Scottish Studies). Unsurprisingly perhaps, these three categories reflect the passing of time in the techniques of recording, and also, and more importantly, in the number of items collected. Thus, the Maclagan manuscripts provide us with a relatively large number of narratives, whether legends or memorates, especially when compared with the contemporary material available from the Sound Archive.

The Maclagan manuscripts were named after Dr Robert Craig Maclagan (1839-1919), who was based in Edinburgh. From what emerges from the manuscripts, Maclagan seems to have sent letters to ministers and school teachers in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, asking them to record in writing any information they could gather from their parishioners or pupils on the 'traditional' customs.[12] He provided his 'collectors' with printed sheets, on which they would indicate the personal details of their informants and, from some of the correspondence included in the papers, it seems that he may have paid the collectors.[13] The accumulated data and correspondence related to it have been distributed in forty volumes, following a more or less chronological order. They represent over nine thousand pages of unadulterated information, ranging from traditional local recipes for food and dyes, to children's games, tales, 'superstitions' and customs – the 'superstitions' often in relation to life-cycle related beliefs and practices, and the customs associated more with calendar rituals and sayings. Although these manuscripts belong to the Folklore Society, they are currently deposited at the School of Scottish Studies, which allowed me to conduct an exhaustive search for waterhorse narratives. I thus 'collected' one hundred and twenty items, which constitute the largest single source (39%) of the whole corpus.[14]

The next most important manuscript sources are the notebooks filled by another set of collectors, sent by John Francis Campbell (1822-1885), and whose contents have been partially published in his *Popular Tales*. The references to the relevant items were obtained through John MacKechnie's catalogue of Gaelic manuscripts (1973). From the thirty-four items he lists, I obtained in fact thirty-nine narratives.[15] Nineteen of them are in notebooks – mainly in Gaelic –[16] kept in Edinburgh University Library in the 'Carmichael-Watson' collection. Among these nineteen items, some seem to be copies of earlier versions, but they have been included under their own number in the Appendix. One particular reference, CW 136, solved the question of the identity – and authenticity – of the writer of the 'Tales of the Water Kelpie', published in the *Celtic Magazine* in 1886-1887. It appears that these tales were collected by Alexander MacBain, who was quoted in the first part of this

[12] There does not seem to have been any questionnaire involved. Certainly none has been conserved, and the items gathered do not follow any kind of repetitive pattern.
[13] There was definitely some money involved, but it could have been the reimbursement of the postal charges incurred by the collectors.
[14] The corpus contains 309 items.
[15] Some of the references were duplicates (between the original notebooks and the edited manuscripts); and others contained more than one narrative.
[16] My thanks are due to Dr Josh Dickson (Dept. of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh), who translated these items into English for me.

chapter, and who had published them previously in the *Highland News* of the 5 January 1885. In the corpus, I gave precedence to the manuscript reference, since it was anterior to the publication in *Celtic Magazine*, and more complete. I was able to consult the twenty other items in the Campbell papers that are in the National Library of Scotland (Mss 50.1; 50.2; 50.3). Most of these were annotated by Campbell with a view to their publication, although only two kelpie stories were retained in the resulting volumes – one was published in the original four-volumes edition (vol. 4: 303-306; Appendix 2 – F58.C.6) and another one was incorporated by John McKay in his *More Popular Highland Tales* (1960: 13; Appendix 2 – F58.B.14).

Published sources include books and articles published mainly in specialised journals such as *The Folk-Lore Journal*, which later became *Folklore*, and the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, to name but two. The articles from *Folklore* were especially helpful in providing kelpie stories from the North-East of Scotland (in particular the Reverend Walter Gregor's contributions), a region otherwise less well covered by folklorists and collectors. Other published material consists of regional studies (e.g. Nicholson's *Golspie*) or general Scottish studies. Whenever I could, I tried to favour original, first-hand accounts, as opposed to edited versions of stories 'recycled' by authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, I sometimes decided to keep stories for which I could not establish a provenance, on the grounds that they were not merely repetitions of known narratives but on the contrary introduced a new, or distinctive element (for example, the ending of MacKinlay's version of the kelpie of Morphie's story, which does not appear in other variants. See Appendix 2 – F94.B1.6).[17]

As for the recordings from the Sound Archive, they bring a welcome contemporary complement to the older material gathered in the books and manuscripts. The first items date back to 1950, and the archives are still growing. The indexing of all the information contained in the hundreds of recordings has not yet been fully achieved, although the situation has been greatly improved since the time when Alan Bruford and Donald Archie MacDonald worked on the classification of the data, in the 1960s and 1970s (see below). By using the three indexes available – the Folktale Archive card index; the Archive card index; and the computerised index – I was able to assemble many more items than had been available to MacDonald (1994-1995), when the computerisation of the Archive index had barely started. It is of course always possible that some references to waterhorses may have

[17] In my endeavour to be exhaustive in the building of the corpus, I may have on occasion added material that perhaps could have been left aside, but I worked on the principle that it would be easier to discard data at a later date, than to retrieve pieces buried in an accumulation of notes and references.

managed to escape this cross-index search and the completion of an extensive index of all the data kept in the Archive could bring some more to our attention. The classification system proposed below does take this into account, and was planned to allow for additions – as most systems do. Many of the recordings are in Gaelic and most have not yet been transcribed, let alone translated. I was greatly helped by Josh Dickson who translated what had been transcribed and by Martin MacIntyre who gave me summaries in English of the stories that had not been transcribed.[18] In some cases, I was able to use the summaries prepared at the time of the incorporation of a new reel into the Archive.[19] As for the recordings made in English, some of the transcriptions were available from the Archive, and the others are mine.

This wide-ranging and systematic search for waterhorse narratives has had a threefold consequence for the existing scholarship on the subject. Firstly, it has produced a not inconsiderable quantity of data, the existence of which had not been hitherto envisaged; secondly, this increase in the number of items has meant that the classification system first devised by Bruford for the Scottish material now stands in need of revision, as new patterns have emerged from the accumulation of narratives. Lastly, certain conclusions drawn from the comparison of various types existing in different countries have become obsolete, due to the availability of much additional Scottish material. This last point will be further discussed in relation to an article by Bo Almqvist (1991b) in the next chapter, while the first observation is illustrated in Appendix 2. This leaves the classification issue, to which I shall now turn.

In an attempt to try and make the process clearer, some issues about definitions need to be addressed first, as they will have a bearing on what is to be included in the catalogue, and what has to be rejected.[20] The waterhorse narratives correspond mainly to what have been called 'fabulates', or migratory legends, and 'memorates', and I shall start with these two technical terms.

A legend can be defined, as we saw earlier, by the close links it weaves between the realm of the supernatural and ordinary reality.

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[18] The latter part of this process would have been, if not impossible, at least incredibly difficult, without the help and efficiency of Stewart Smith, the Archive technician.

[19] The items not transcribed/translated in their entirety are indicated by the word 'Summary' in square brackets at the start of the paragraph.

[20] The 'rejects' form the part entitled 'Miscellaneous' in Appendix 2. This catch-all category, which does not belong to the migratory legend collection, allowed me to present nonetheless all the data I came across concerning the waterhorse. It was then possible to include in the corpus of Scottish material, not only narratives that I found difficult, at this stage, to incorporate in the main catalogue, but also a narrative that clearly is a folktale although it features the waterhorse (Appendix 2 – Misc. A.1)

> In migratory legends, ... side by side with the world of everyday reality there exists an 'other' world whose spirit is clearly distinct. To all outward appearances this otherworld is not so far away. At any moment it can affect the everyday world, and its inhabitants often dwell among humankind. (Lüthi 1986 [1947]: 4)

Other characteristics of the legend are that it is usually a short, self-contained, account; and, more often than not, it is associated with a particular place or person. As Linda Dégh skillfuly summarised:

> The legend, above all, is more local than the tale, more likely to develop local patterns in spite of its tendency to migrate and spread cross-culturally. It ranges from the simple communication of belief through various levels to the most intricate, multi-episodic narrative. (1972: 73)[21]

To qualify as 'migratory', a legend should, following MacDonald's guidelines, 'have been noted in multiple variants' (at least two), and some of them should be separated geographically by 'some distance'. (1994-1995: 29). The maps illustrating the various types of waterhorse narratives found in Scotland will constitute, I hope, sufficient proof that they do qualify as migratory legends.

Memorates for their part are akin to legends in that they deal with otherworldly beings, but they correspond more to testimonies than to narratives with a recognisable plot. Reidar Th. Christiansen defined memorates as: 'accounts of actual experience at either first or second hand and almost always connected with some landmark, locality or person.' (1958: 5) Because they are, first, so linked to a spatio-temporal context and, second, devoid of identifiable plot, memorates are difficult to integrate into any typology, let alone one with international pretentions. Christiansen chose to leave them aside on the grounds that they are not truly migratory (1958: 5); and MacDonald followed the same route for the Scottish classification, although his decision seems to have been motivated by quantity issues (1994-1995: 29). However, unlike MacDonald's article, which was a survey of the totality of the 'Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland', my concerns lie 'only' with the waterhorse narratives, making the size issue more manageable. The fact that Bruford did provide space within his preliminary classification system for 'Experience of Sighting' persuaded me to keep the memorates related to the belief in the waterhorse in the system. Further considerations also encouraged me in this direction. Thus, although I

[21] Indeed, the narratives gathered in the corpus of waterhorse tales do present this wide range of forms.

agree with Christiansen that memorates do not have a place in international catalogues, national 'scenes' represent another matter entirely.[22]

Firstly, memorates can play an important role in onomastics and, in that sense, they can be used to corroborate, or add weight to, such information as is found in legends. The next extract explains where the name of the 'Loch of the one-night shieling' in Lewis come from:

> F4.B.33 *Loch of the one-night shieling*
> A man from Leurbost decided to build his shieling bothy beside a pleasant loch, deep in the hill, as the practice was at the time. He took his cattle with him, and settled down to sleep for the first night in the shieling. On hearing strange noises outside, he got up to investigate, and by the light of the full moon, saw a hideous beast with shining eyes emerge from the loch. Not surprisingly, he fled, leaving his bothy and his cattle, and the place was never occupied again. The loch is called Loch Airigh na h-Aon Oidhche, 'the loch of the one-night shieling'. It lies in the hill a few miles to the south of the village of Achmore in Lewis. (*Tocher* 1977-1978 (27): 182- 183; from Calum MacArthur, Achmore, Lewis)

Secondly, one must consider their kinship with certain legends in the way some of them reflect, through individual histories, the existence of some type of legend at a given space and time. They can also function as witnesses to how popular some of the beliefs they refer to were, again with more or less precise parameters of time and space. The following account is an example of this 'use' of a memorate, as an anecdote on personal history documenting, as it were, the existence of a type of legend:

> F4.C.2 *The offspring of Loch Ghrimsaidh's each uisge*
> A current story tells of an each uisge that was at one time in Loch Ghrimsaidh, from which a certain family was supposed to have sprung, and on this account used to be called *siol an t-each uisge* (the descendants of the water horse). One time a lad was courting a girl. She belonged to a family of those who were said to have been descended from the water horse, and the lad's mother, who was not at all satisfied with her son's choice made a song to him, in which she described some of the girl's distant ancestors on their mother's side, as having come out of the loch, and having been clothed with skin. (Maclagan Mss: 3354-3355; from Mrs Morrison, Portcharlotte, Islay)

This memorate makes even more sense when one is aware of the existence of the legend in which a waterhorse is said to have managed to keep a woman long enough

[22] I will refer to the very specific case of the Scottish waterhorses, but I believe that the arguments I propose could apply to any national context.

for her to bear him children. Following the logic of the legend, the anecdote is built on the idea that these children would at some point have become adult. As we will see in more depth in the next two chapters, this type of anecdote is also evocative of the determination to keep the otherworld and the human world separate. Lastly, even though it is more than likely that the song composed by the lad's mother is now lost, one is always hopeful that more folk songs, narratives, customs might still come to light, and this little piece of information would then provide a welcome background should such a song be 'discovered'.

Memorates can also allow us to gauge how widespread a type of legend may have been. This can be seen in the following passage which essentially gives a powerful example of a belief 'at work':

> F4.C.3 *The industrious neighbour*
> A native of Uist says that belief in the existence of eich uisge (water horses) was very common in Uist. In his native parish there was a man who was more industrious than his neighbours. He used to be up early and continued working often till it would be pretty late. He was not a favourite among the people, and when it was seen that his ploughing was so far forward compared with other people's, they did not realize that his industrious habits accounted for it, the story went about that he was making use of an each uisge in his plough under the cover of night, and people did not care to have much to do with him. (Maclagan Mss: 3352; from M. Macdonald, a native of Uist).

This extract takes on additional importance, and, most importantly, relevance when it is compared with the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' type of legends, in which the waterhorse is presented as the workhorse *par excellence*, able to work harder and longer than normal horses.[23] This link between memorates and legends is the reason why I feel strongly that they should not be separated – at least not in their national context. All are inter-related, especially in terms of the belief system they refer to.

This inclusive approach should then result in a twofold system of classification: one national, and the other international. Practically, this would ensure that someone interested, for instance, in the geographical distribution of a legend could have access to this type of information without being overwhelmed by irrelevant pieces, while at the same time it would allow local ethnologists to have at their disposal a mass of information not truncated because of international demands on classification. As long as an international system of classification is agreed upon beforehand, there is no reason to impose on the local systems a similar 'calibration' – provided that they include cross-references to the international system. This is also the conclusion

[23] This type will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

reached by Christiansen – even if his argument did not follow the same line. Conceding that separate national catalogues would always be a necessity, due to the fact that some legends simply do not occur elsewhere, he also stated that:

> At the same time, however, a certain stock of legends do exist that are widely known and such tales can be fitted into an international classification. The various catalogues dealing with groups of national legends would then only have to add the type number here proposed for entries of such tales of wider circulation. (1958: 5)

This suggestion appeared in his introduction to the catalogue of Norwegian migratory legends, and, in effect, it provided legend scholars with a frame useable in an international context – much as had been the case with the folktale type index devised by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (see 1987 [1961]).

Earlier in the same introduction, he proposed to make the distinction, in classification, between folktales and legends according to their different natures:

> The folktale is of the nature of fiction, while legends are told and accepted as accounts of what has really happened and are founded on folk-belief. Folktales, therefore, have to be classified according to the contents, i.e. the plot of the tale... Legends, however, because they are founded upon folk-belief, must be classified according to the various aspects of such belief even though the pattern may vary. (1958: 4)

Christiansen implemented this distinction by giving separate category numbers to the legends dealing with, for instance, fairies and those dealing with water spirits. His numbering system corresponds to that of the folktale type index, starting at the number 3000, and using only every fifth number, so as to be sure to 'leave sufficient room for the new additions that ... are sure to come' (1958: 5). The main types are further subdivided into more specific groups of legends. Thus, to take the category of interest to us, the numbers 4050 to 4090 are dedicated to the 'Spirits of Rivers, Lakes and the Sea', and more specifically, 4085 is the number for the stories of 'The Seahorse and the Seaserpent'. The fact that Christiansen's classification system can be adopted in other countries is illustrated by the work that Bo Almqvist has conducted on the Irish legends of the waterhorse, especially in regard to their counterparts in Scotland and Sweden (1991b). He presented the two Irish types under the numbers MLSIT 4086 ('Waterhorse as Workhorse') and MLSIT 4086B ('Waterhorse as Racehorse').[24] One of the aims of this chapter, and more generally of

[24] The initials stand for Migratory Legend Suggested Irish Type.

this study, will be to assign such international numbers to the Scottish types, as and when relevant.

The situation in Scotland is made particularly complex, as far as waterhorse narratives are concerned, by the great variety of the types in which they can appear. The chart below (Fig. 6.1) shows the distribution of these narratives.

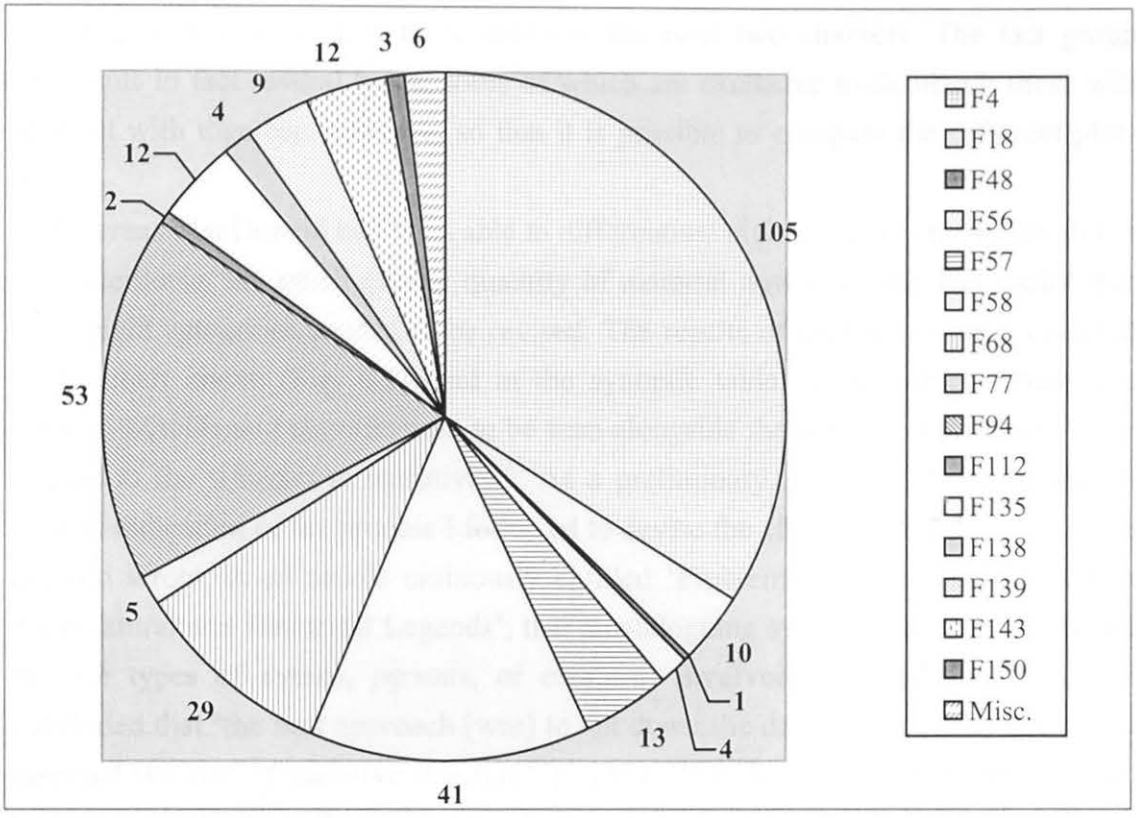

Figure 6.1 - General distribution of Scottish waterhorse narratives

(The numbers shown indicate the number of items for each category)

The form assumed by the waterhorse more or less dictates its actions. It should be kept in mind that, because we are dealing with oral narratives, there will always be exceptions to the categories I am about to detail but a general pattern, however, does emerge from the whole corpus of narratives as it is presented in Appendix 2. This pattern is as follows:

- When dealing with men, the waterhorse first appears to be a normal horse, but it still retains some supernatural attributes that are discovered at the start or at the end of the narration. The waterhorse can either kill the man involved or not.

- When dealing with children, it presents itself as a beautiful pony or a beautiful horse grazing by the side of a loch. It can accommodate as many children as try to climb onto its back, before plunging with them back into the loch.
- When dealing with women, it usually takes the form of a very handsome young man, a stranger who is often somewhat promiscuous and impatient, before turning back into its equine self.

These three categories represent the main oicotypes of the Scottish waterhorse stories and they will be treated in more depth in the next two chapters. The last group represents in fact several types, some of which are exclusive to Scotland; these will be dealt with together, however, so that it is possible to compare the different plot-lines.

Whereas MacDonald had been able to differentiate eight types of stories involving the waterhorse, the much greater quantity of material now available has meant that these eight categories needed to be revised. The results of such a task are presented in the chart above (Fig. 6.1), and in the synoptic table below, which allows the Bruford-MacDonald classification to be seen alongside the new one I propose – with respect to the waterhorse narratives.[25] As a preliminary, however, I would like to give an indication of the process I followed to devise the classification. In 1979, Alan Bruford wrote, in an article ominously entitled 'Problems in Cataloguing Scottish Supernatural and Historical Legends', that a cataloguing system should not be based on 'the types of events, persons, or creatures involved in them' (p. 155), and concluded that 'the best approach [was] to cut down the description of the tale to the essential skeleton of narrative structure' (p. 156). This declaration of intention came, I suspect, partly from Bruford's knowledge of the Scottish material in general, and partly as a reaction to the Aarne-Thompson folktale classification system, which can be confusing to use at times. However, this approach did not always make sense in our particular context. The very diversity of plots in which the waterhorse is involved tells us a lot, I feel, about its importance in the Scottish imagination, perhaps even psyche, and it would appear that the creature itself is as defining a criterion for cataloguing Scottish migratory legends, as are its actions, or in other words the plots. This has inevitably led to a mixed approach, which, if it is not entirely satisfactory in theoretical terms, has nevertheless the merit of being based on the full material available. Some stories are waterhorse stories, and have been acknowledged as such; others sometimes feature the waterhorse – but are not exclusively devoted to it. The

[25] The overall classification system has not been questioned, although I believe that the same kind of reassessment could probably benefit the fairy stories as well, as the computerisation of the Archive index is sure to bring about an increase in data in that area also.

latter have been incorporated into types that can be used for other supernatural beings. In close relation to this last point, some of the changes effectuated in Bruford's classification only amount to the replacement of 'fairy' by 'supernatural', which then made it possible to create sub-divisions – for 'fairy', 'waterhorse', etc. – while leaving the overall type unaltered. The changes of terms and the creation of new types have been indicated by the use of '*' before the specific term or type.

Synoptic Table of the Types of Scottish Migratory Legends Featuring the Waterhorse

Bruford-MacDonald Classification	**Amended Classification**
F1-F50: Encounters; Habitat	
F4. Space	***F4. Knowledge/Sighting of the Waterhorse** A – Waterhorse known to be attached to particular location B – Sighting of the waterhorse C – Anecdotes and general statements
F18. *Fairies* Haunt Mill	**F18. ****Supernatural Beings* Haunt Mill** A – Fairy B – Waterhorse (B1: Waterhorse; B2: Njuggle [Shetland])
F48. Supernatural Taken for Cripple. Helped until Discovered to Have: A – Hooves B – Webbed feet	**F48. Supernatural Taken for Cripple. Helped until Discovered to Have:** A – Hooves (no waterhorse instance) B – Webbed feet (1 waterhorse instance)

F51-F100: Abductions; Thefts	
F56. Other Tales of *Fairy* Suitors Foiled or Driven away (cf. ML 6000)	**F56. Other Tales of **Supernatural* Suitors Foiled or Driven away (cf. ML 6000)** A – Waterhorse
F57. Woman Meets Waterhorse in Human Form and Goes with him – he Carries her off into Loch	***F57. Waterhorse as Young Man Seduces Girl – they Marry and Have Children – she Escapes (he Sings a Lullaby)**
F58. Woman Meets Waterhorse in Human Form and Goes with him – but Finds Grains of Sand in his Hair when Combing it and Realises what he is A – Runs away B – He is driven away/killed with hot iron C – Variant with Mi-fhéin (AT 1137: cf. F143; F18)	***F58. Waterhorse as Young Man Meets Girl – Rests his Head on her Lap/Asks her to Comb his Hair – she Realises what he is and Runs Away** A – She is safe B – He comes back and carries her off into loch C – Bull let loose to fight waterhorse
F68. Children Carried off into Loch when they Ride on Waterhorse	**F68. Children Carried off by the Waterhorse** *A – All drown *B – One escapes (B1: by cutting off finger/hand; B2: thanks to Christian protection; B3: other)
F74. Man Carried off by: A – Host of Fairies B – Waterhorse	F74.B: see now *F94.A
F77. Space	***F77. Woman Carried off by Waterhorse**

F94. Waterhorse Caught and Harnessed A – To plough B – Carries stones for building or other materials C – Escapes when bridle is taken off, or D – Put on by girl whom it carries off	***F94. Waterhorse as Workhorse (cf. MLSIT 4086)** A – Taken for a ride (A1: rider carried off into loch; A2: rider manages to escape) B – Caught with bridle and made to work (B1: dragging stones; B2: ploughing) C – Caught by removing bridle D – Left alone
F101-F130: Wishes; Help; Gifts	
F112. Wish for Female Company: MacPhee's Black Dog	**F112. Wish for Female Company:** A – MacPhee's black dog B – Horse-fairy (Kelpie)
F131-F150: Attacks; Escapes	
F135. Space	***F135. Waterhorse Attacks:** A – Girls in shieling B – Men; waterhorse is subdued or killed
F138. 'The Hour Has Come but not the Man' (cf. ML 4050) A – Kelpie waits for traveller at ford B – Mermaid seen: ship's crew drowned C – Mermaid seen: one man drowned (one who threw a fish at her and she sank) D – Mermaid seen by man; brings ship to shore before great storm	**F138. 'The Hour Has Come but not the Man' (cf. ML 4050)** A – *Waterhorse waits for traveller in river/at ford

F139. Space	***F139. Waterhorse Tries to Drown Human in River** A – Human escapes B – Human drowns
F143. *Mi fhéin* (cf. AT 1137)	**F143. *Mi fhéin* (cf. AT 1137)**
F150. Dog Drives Away Supernatural - Returns Hairless or not at all (cf. W3)	**F150. Dog Drives Away Supernatural** *A – Never Returns *B – Other

Conclusion

The reassessment of part of the Scottish system of classification of migratory legends raises almost more issues than it manages to solve, whether internal or indeed with a more general range. First, the identification of almost three hundred waterhorse narratives has, unsurprisingly, strained the hitherto self-contained Scottish system. As a result, it will have to be *entirely* revised, that is, if it is going to be useful to researchers who may not be acquainted with the contents of the Folktale Archive. The first change to make should probably concern the title of the classification, so that it is made clear that it does not only deal with 'fairy legends', but instead with 'legends of the supernatural' (see MacDonald 1994-1995: 68).

Then, each existing category ought to be considered, not merely on its own, but also in relation to others. For instance, if we take the two types F16. 'Fairies Haunt Shieling' and F17. 'Fairies Haunt Mill', it seems worth questioning the fact that the narratives had been initially separated into two groups: does the structure of the stories justify two different types, or could they be gathered into one 'Supernatural Haunts Human Building' type? This is perhaps not necessary, or even advisable; I am merely emphasising here the need for a global approach. This process of 'tidying up' should benefit the existing classification on at least two counts: it would give a logical progression to what is at the moment a disparate list, in terms of the actors (fairies, seals, waterhorses), and also in terms of their actions (do they haunt, abduct, steal, help, etc.?); and it would thereby become easier to compare with international, and indeed other national, systems.

At the more general level, there is a concern linked to the viability and desirability of an international system which only takes in the legends that are common to

different areas, as was proposed by Christiansen (see above). To apply this to our Scottish case, this would mean that the narratives in which the waterhorse seduces a girl, which seem to be exclusive to Scotland, would by definition be omitted from this international system. To anyone not *au fait* with the Scottish legendary lore, they would simply not exist. This also raises the question as to how it would be possible to know whether such a type had international parallels or not.

I shall conclude this chapter by proposing two additions to the Migratory Legend catalogue. They are: MLS[uggested] T[ype] 4087: 'Children Ride on the Waterhorse'; and MLST 4088: 'Waterhorse as Seducer', which would regroup different types that could be related to this – very basic – premise.

CHAPTER 7

TWO SHARED TYPES OF STORIES – 'THE WATERHORSE AS WORKHORSE' AND 'CHILDREN RIDE ON THE WATERHORSE'

Introduction

This chapter and the next are based on the premise that legends provide a certain image of the society within which they exist. This perception of oral narratives has been presented in the previous chapter, so I shall not come back to it at great length here. Suffice it to say that the two types of migratory legends that are going to be dealt with in this chapter show particularly well, through the changes that occur in various milieux, how one community chose to develop a particular aspect of the story, while in the next geographical area, although the same general theme may be found, another motif will have been developed. The idea that the study of legends can contribute to the understanding of the society that creates them represents one facet of a wider trend of research. Writing on folklore in general – of which legends form but one part – Alan Dundes captured well the benefits its study could bring.

> I am interested in folklore because it represents a people's image of themselves. The image may be distorted but at least the distortion comes from the people, not from an outside observer armed with a range of a priori premises. Folklore as a mirror of culture provides unique raw material for those eager to better understand themselves and others. (1980: viii)

As we will see, the didactic character of the waterhorse stories, wherever they may come from, is a very important one. Thus, the study of a particular type, in its distinctive settings and in relation to other precise types and settings, will give us a vivid representation of the 'people's image of themselves'.

The decision to present the two types of legends together – 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' and 'Children Ride on the Waterhorse'[1] – was motivated by the fact that they are both found outside Scotland, which is not the case for the narratives featuring the waterhorse as a young man seducing girls.[2]

In the first part of this chapter, the workhorse narratives will be presented in their international context before we seek to determine their principal traits in the Scottish tradition. The second section will deal with a comparison of the children narratives in Scandinavia and Scotland.

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[1] I will use the general title when I am referring to this motif – as opposed to 'Children Carried off by the Waterhorse' which applies only to the Scottish context.

[2] This motif is found in different types, which will be treated in the next chapter.

Part 1 – Workhorse legends

I – WORKHORSE LEGENDS IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Geographically, the 'waterhorse as workhorse' theme is found from Ireland and Scotland to Iceland and Sweden. The question of the origin of the legends remains difficult to determine definitively, although it would appear, as we will see in more detail below, that the general direction in which they have spread is orientated from Ireland and Scotland towards the Nordic countries (see Almqvist 1991a: 31). As an illustration of this, the motif of the supernatural horse captured and used to work the land until it disappears back into water is found in the Icelandic *Book of Settlements*, the *Landnámabók*:

> Audun the Stutterer, son of Vali the Strong, took possession of the whole of Hraunsfjord above Hraun, between Svinawater and Trolla Bridge. He was a big powerful man and lived at Hraunsfjord. He married Myrun, daughter of King Maddad of Ireland. One autumn, Audun saw a dapple-grey horse come racing down from Hjardarwater, make straight for his herd of horses and floor the stallion. Audun went and caught the grey horse, hitched him to a two-ox sledge and hauled home all the hay from his home-meadow. The horse was quite manageable till noon, but later in the day he began stamping into the ground right up to the fetlocks. After sunset he tore the harness apart, galloped back to the lake, and that was the last anyone ever saw of him.[3]

This brings us early literary evidence not only of the very existence of the legend in the twelfth or thirteenth century, but also of a possible Scotto-Irish origin of the motif, as Vali the Strong lived in the Hebrides and Audun's wife was the daughter of an Irish king. This 'parentage' means that the theme of the supernatural horse used as workhorse could have travelled with the settlers to Iceland, although we cannot assert this with certainty. However, other clues seem to corroborate this evidence. For instance, according to Bo Almqvist's final argument concerning both their provenance and age, the presence in the Faroe Islands of a particular aspect of the stories, otherwise restricted to Ireland and Scotland, would seem to validate the northward direction of dissemination. This exclusive trait is that the lungs and liver of the waterhorse's victims were said to be found floating on the lake into which they had been carried off.[4] As the Viking Age provides the probable period for this, it

[3] H. Pálsson and P. Edwards (eds), 1972: 44.
[4] See Almqvist 1991b: 112 (especially n. 13 for further references); 119.

would follow 'that the legends in question were fully developed before c. 1000.' (1991b: 119)

If the workhorse theme itself is found all over the North-East Atlantic area, there are nonetheless some interesting variations in the development of the motifs. These variations seem to be linked to specific areas, thus placing the legends in a broader context of mainly socio-cultural, but also ethical and religious, norms and attitudes. In Ireland for instance, the workhorse stories, which represent the majority of waterhorse legends,[5] were noted by Annaba Kilfeather (1988: 39) to be related to the Fairy Cow motif: a male protagonist catches, wittingly or not, a supernatural animal, and uses it to help him in his daily work. This supernatural creature brings wealth to the farmer until some event triggers its going back to the Otherworld, usually through the medium of water. In the Irish stories involving the waterhorse, the general pattern is that the horse goes back to its lake when driven there to drink, or when the farmer swears at it, curses or strikes it. The latter is especially prominent in the stories involving a mare. The farmer shows great care and kindness to her, and she has foals that he sells, thus becoming rich. Then, one day, he strikes the mare – generally unintentionally – precipitating his own death: the mare calls for her offspring and goes back to the water accompanied by all the foals she had borne and that the farmer had sold, taking the man with her.

> Near the Ladies' Bray which is about 13 miles from Dromore West on the Sligo side there is a lake called Loch an Chroí. There once lived a farmer near this lake who had a very large farm of mountain and bog. The lake was a large one and the people of the district believed it was enchanted. They believed that under its dark waters lived great kings and chiefs of long ago.
>
> This particular farmer became very poor. All his stock died and when he bought some more to replace them they too died. Spring then came and he felt very distressed and lonely not having a horse to plough his land. He did not know what to do. One evening he was out walking on his farm – very grieved and down-hearted – when looking towards the lake what did he see but a most beautiful jet-black mare grazing along the lake. He went near her. She stood up – looked at him. He caught hold of her and took her home with him to his stable. He fed her and patted her and grew very fond of her. She ploughed and worked for him with cart and car very quietly. Each year she had a foal which the farmer sold and got well-paid for it. He was now growing very rich. The mare worked willingly and quietly for him for many

[5] See the article by Annaba Kilfeather on 'The Water Horse Legends in Ireland' (1988), in which she presents the results of her research on the 'Water Horse Belief in Ireland' (third-year dissertation for the Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin, 1987-1988). She analysed the material from the Irish Folklore Commission manuscripts, from both the so-called Main and Schools collections, and found that, out of 265 references to the waterhorse, 149 were migratory legends, 99 of which were variants of the 'Plough story', that is to say the 'waterhorse as workhorse' legend.

> years. During all this time the farmer was very kind to her. He never gave her even one blow.
>
> At last one day as the farmer rode the mare to the lake for a drink he struck her with the bridle. The mare leaped and neighed three times. Immediately all the foals she ever reared came round her. Then the mare with the man on her back, and all the foals dashed into the lake. It seems the farmer was killed, for it is believed that on the next day his heart was seen floating on the surface of the lake, and from that day the lake is called Loch an Chroí [heart lake].[6]

In other examples, the man is ploughing his field unaware that one of the horses is a waterhorse. Suddenly, the waterhorse just goes back to its lake, dragging the other horse, the plough and the man into the lake. Neither man nor horse is seen ever again.

The first observation to make on the Irish material, is that, on the whole, these encounters between a farmer and a waterhorse end up in the death of the man, either because of a momentary loss of temper that bears terrible and irreversible consequences, or through the 'recognition' (for want of a better word), by the horse, of its original lake. This last point takes me to my second remark, which is an interesting similarity between these waterhorse stories and another set of migratory legends entitled 'The man who never slept'.[7] In these, a man who is unable to sleep is told the secret of his conception, his father being none other than a water creature. The man, now aware of his origin and nature, goes back to the lake where his father dwells, and returns to the water. It should be made clear that I am by no means suggesting a kinship of any sort between these two types. I wish merely to point out the resemblance between the endings, rendered all the more interesting by the fact that this particular motif – the supernatural returning to its element upon seeing the lake it came from, literally or metaphorically – seems to be extremely rare in the Scottish narratives.[8] Thirdly, the analytical conclusions, drawn both by Kilfeather and Almqvist on the significance of the stories, stress that the contents of these workhorse legends provide indications, both moral and cultural, of what was considered the 'right' way to treat horses in the communities where they were told. Thus,

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[6] IFC S 167: 50-51 (written out by Seosamh Ó Catháin, NT, 1937). Reproduced in Almqvist 1991c: 236-237.

[7] MLSIT 4082; see Hillers (1991) for a survey of these legends.

[8] In the Scottish material, the emphasis is more upon the removal of the bridle – see below F94.B1.1, in which it is clearly stated that the waterhorse 'made' the man take its bridle off, and only then was able to plunge into the river. Nevertheless, one story recorded in 1973 (F94.B2.9) does incorporate the motif of the waterhorse returning to its loch when passing near it – this narrative is very interesting because a variation of it, linked to the same loch, was collected almost a century previously, with the emphasis on the magic precaution being omitted (Appendix 2 – F94.B2.8).

> we are ... given to understand that the reason why the waterhorse escapes ... is that he resents being forced to work too long and not being able to enjoy the rest he should be entitled to after a long day's toil. The same message – that a horse should be handled kindly – is expressed in those Irish variants in which it is said that the horse escapes having been maltreated, struck or the like, specifically with his own bridle. (Almqvist 1991b: 113)

Kilfeather, for her part, notes that interaction between man and the supernatural is always tainted with danger, and that the legends should be taken as a warning 'against any dealings with the supernatural world'. (1988: 44) We shall see below to what extent these conclusions can be applied to the Scottish narratives.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, these workhorse legends have been given the international catalogue number MLSIT 4086, which designates the 'plough stories'. There is also in Ireland another sub-category of the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' that concerns the waterhorse being captured and kept for racing (to which the international number MLSIT 4086B has been allotted). As it is apparently confined to Ireland, it will not be dealt with here in detail. However, I shall give an example of this type and present Almqvist's reasons for considering it part of the workhorse legend group, principally because of other legends found in Scotland and Scandinavia and involving 'Grown-ups Ride on the Waterhorse', which also appear to be variants of the workhorse theme.

> *Legend of the lake of Loughrea*
> Some years ago, the people of Loughrea, especially those who dwelt near the lake, used to hear horses galloping round the lake when midnight came. A certain man heard of the mysterious galloping, so one night he remained up, and continually watched the lake until the horses came round. The man jumped at one of the horses, and wonderfully enough, he succeeded in catching him. He did not know what to do, so he went to an old witch to inform her of what had happened. She ordered the man to keep the fairy horse stabled for one full year and one full day. The man obeyed, and the races of Knockbarran were drawing near. However, the horse had remained a year indoors, but the day was not up by the time the races were at hand. The man boasted about the horse, and the good job he made of him, and feeling sure of winning, he took him to the race-course. The horse was very wild, and swift, and on this account, the majority of the people were admiring, and wondering at the noble animal. The first race was about to begin, and the horses were galloping slowly practising. When the fairy horse began to run, instead of going round the course with the others, he took seven jumps, or springs in a straight line, and right into the lake. From that day, he was not seen, or heard of. At present, the traces of his feet are said to

> be visible, and a little spring of water bumps up at each track, and these springs are supposed to be still feeding the lake.[9]

Although it is not mentioned in this particular instance, other narratives tell how and where the rider got killed by the horse, giving to these legends an aetiological character, also found in Scotland, if in different contexts.[10] Almqvist's argument for classifying these legends as subtypes of the workhorse legends is twofold. First, using a comparative method, he demonstrates that the Irish racehorse stories are only apparently connected to their counterparts in the Swedish tradition, headed 'Grown-ups Ride on the Waterhorse'. As these will be treated further below, I shall only mention here that, as Almqvist points out, the contents of the racehorse stories seem to be closer to the workhorse narratives, in that, in both the waterhorse is captured against his will, and in both the farmer intends to gain some kind of profit from the waterhorse (1991b: 116). The second part of his reasoning rests upon the geographical distribution of the racehorse stories, which would seem to indicate that they developed from the workhorse ones, thus becoming a subtype, as opposed to forming a different type.[11] He concludes: 'That such a sub-type should arise in Ireland where horse racing has for so long been keenly embraced is only natural.' (id.)

We shall now turn to the situation in Nordic countries, which bears some striking similarities to the situation in Scotland – in the workhorse type and also in other types of the waterhorse legends.[12] In an article published in 1944, Brita Egardt treated the waterhorse legends in Sweden, among which she distinguished between four different groups of stories. Among them figures the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' group, with stories following a simple frame: a farmer sees a waterhorse; he catches it and puts a halter on it; he is then able to use the waterhorse for ploughing; at the end of the day the halter is removed, and consequently the waterhorse disappears (see p. 134). As we will see, this causal relationship between the disappearance of the waterhorse and the removal of its halter (or bridle, as in Scotland) is also a central

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[9] IFC S 51: 271-272 (from Kathleen Shiel, age thirteen, 9 November 1938). She states that she 'read the story in a book, which was written over two hundred years ago'.

[10] See for example the story given in Almqvist 1991c: 237-239, where the man, called George, was killed near a heap of stones that was given his name: *Leacht Sheoirse*, George's Mound.

[11] Kilfeather provides a map of the distribution of waterhorse legends in Ireland (1988: 40).

[12] These include the stories about children climbing on the waterhorse which will be treated in the second part of this chapter. Other stories are those in which the waterhorse is scalded by a human who calls himself (or predominantly herself in Scotland) 'Myself', thus deflecting the anger of the maimed waterhorse, and/or of his relatives (F143 in the Scottish migratory legends classification system and AT1137 in the international folktale classification system).

element in the Scottish narratives.[13] In contrast to the Irish stories, the farmer is not, as a rule, carried off by the waterhorse when he releases it – which parallels the Scottish stories.

Beside the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' stories, the next category is headed 'Waterhorse as Riding Horse' and comprises two subdivisions: one deals with 'Children Ride on the Waterhorse', and the other is entitled 'Grown-ups Ride on the Waterhorse'. It is the latter that is of interest to us here, and I need to address briefly a problem of classification, as it has bearings on the understanding of the choice of narratives I have made. The contents of such stories are straightforward: a man sees a horse and wants to ride it; he catches and mounts the animal, which, turning out to be the waterhorse, gallops off towards its lake to drown the man; the man then pronounces a powerful name, usually Christian, and saves his life at the last moment. In Scotland, the rider usually dies, unable to throw himself off the horse. Apart from the ending, the story line appears to be the same, and I have found it more often and in less 'confused' terms than the material available ten years ago indicated.[14] Indeed, this particular motif appears in over a third of the stories dealing with men that I have been able to gather (see Appendix 2 – F94.A). This brings me to the point of definition I mentioned above. Although the 'Grown-ups Ride on Waterhorse' subtype has not been assimilated by Egardt or Almqvist to the 'Workhorse' type, in regard of the Scottish evidence as a coherent ensemble, it would seem that the former represents in fact a subtype of the latter. I shall argue the reasons for this in the next part of this chapter, concerned with the analysis of the Scottish material.

II – Workhorse legends in Scotland

The Scottish stories present a wider range of variants than either the Nordic or the Irish material does, even within this single type, although the shift in cataloguing mentioned previously could account for part of this diversity. As I hope to demonstrate, this rearrangement, which was prompted by an increase in the number of narratives handled, brings to light a distinctive pattern in the Scottish material, to which it gives a certain coherence. This part of the corpus of waterhorse narratives that I have been gathering comes mainly from the Maclagan Manuscripts, a collection of folklore from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland initiated by Dr R. C. Maclagan in the last decade of the nineteenth century. A small number come from published material (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), and fewer still

[13] This motif of the removal of the bridle also exists in some of the Irish racehorse legends, which, as Almqvist noted, only reinforces the link between them and the workhorse legends (see 1991b: 116).
[14] See Almqvist 1991b: 109.

were found in other manuscripts kept in the Archives of the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies (University of Edinburgh). The 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' legends can be divided into four main categories, two of which are further sub-divided. However, I believe that these four categories reflect only one general, central theme – the existence of four distinct categories simply pertaining to the way the legends are constructed. The main theme is that of the 'magic bridle', and the categories are:

A) the waterhorse is caught and taken for a ride (A1 – the rider is carried off into the loch; A2 – the rider escapes);
B) the waterhorse is caught with a bridle and made to work (B1 – dragging stones; B2 – ploughing);
C) the waterhorse is caught by removing its bridle;
D) the waterhorse is left alone.

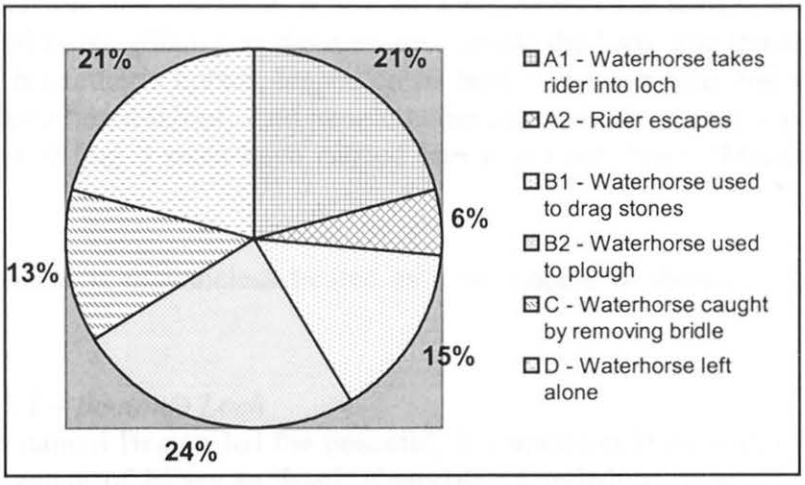

Fig. 7.1 – Distribution of the variants of the migratory legend type F94: 'Waterhorse as Workhorse'

Working on the totality of the waterhorse narratives, the pivotal role of the bridle soon becomes apparent. Whereas in the first group the bridle is never mentioned and death ensues in an overwhelming number of stories, the second and third groups, in which the bridle is part of the plot, are never associated with the death of the farmer, or any other man who caught the waterhorse.[15] Lastly, in the fourth group, the man who encounters the supernatural animal does not try to catch it but leaves it well

[15] The last group contains two variants of one story in which the waterhorse carries off the maiden who gave him the bridle back, but the man who caught it never gets hurt.

alone, and goes on his way, unharmed.[16] I shall now present each of these subtypes in more detail, in the order given above.

I strongly believe that Egardt's 'Grown-ups Ride on the Waterhorse' should be regarded as one of the sub-categories of the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' – although I cannot propose a 'kinship system' in the way Almqvist did for the Workhorse and Racehorse narratives,. The main, practical, reason why I have chosen this approach is that the horses involved in the 'ride' legends are not what I will call 'leisure' horses, but on the contrary are thought of as working horses. Sometimes the ride itself can present a fanciful aspect (there was no real need for it), as in this example of the Loch Frisa narratives:[17]

> F94.A1.4 *Water horse in Loch Frisa*
> There is a loch on the Estate of Aros, in Mull, called Loch Frisa. It used to be said that this loch was the haunt of a water-horse; and a story is still told, how that on one occasion, a son of Fear Arois (the laird's son), saw a beautiful horse grazing on the meadow, beside the loch, and thinking it was one of his father's horses, leaped on its back to have a ride, and was never afterwards heard tell of. And people believed, it is said, that it was the Each Uisge, and that it must have carried him into Loch Frisa. (Maclagan Mss: 1804)

That the horse is nonetheless treated as a workhorse is shown in the following narrative:

> F94.A1.1 – *Beaton's Loch*
> A man named Beaton led the peaceful, if sometimes busy life, of a farmer on the estate of Ellary in South Knapdale, Argyllshire. It was in the time when every rood of ground maintained its man, and before the estate passed out of the hands of the genial and popular lairds of Shirvain. Beaton's stock was a small one and certain it is that one horse sufficed to work his farm for him. It seems very probable that for him, light labour spread her wholesome store; just gave what life required but gave no more. But to the point: Beaton used to allow his horse the sun of the hills when there was nothing particular to do. Amongst those hills are numerous lochs. Going one day for his horse, our friend found it grazing by the side of one of those. He rode it home and worked it all day. In the evening, he began to think that altho' this horse was very like his own, still there was a difference, and supposing it

[16] This group is the least homogeneous of the four: alhough the general pattern is the one I have given, there are a number of isolated stories that amount to the same ending, albeit using slightly differing plots. For instance, in F94.D.10 – 'Waterhorse disappears after being sold at the market', the protagonist does go with the waterhorse, which in fact is doing him a favour, and afterwards disappears, without hurting the man. There is no mention in this narrative that the man tried to ride or catch the waterhorse, which, ultimately, is the reason why it has a place in this subtype (see Appendix 2).

[17] I have found seven variants of the Loch Frisa legend (see Appendix 2).

> was a neighbours', which had been let loose to graze amongst the hills, he rode away with it. Night came and at last gave way to the gray dawn of another day, and still poor Beaton did not put in an appearance in his home. The neighbours were now aroused and all set off to scour the hills in search of the missing man. Here and there they came across the footprints of a horse. They followed those as best they could and they brought them to the brink of a loch. The sight which met their gaze turned them sick with horror. The loch was red with gore and now for the first time did they think that the animal, which wrought a day's work in Ellary was none other than the waterhorse, and poor Beaton was never seen dead or alive.[18]

This story presents several points of interest. Firstly, although we are here clearly in presence of a waterhorse being used as workhorse, it is equally clear that being worked was not the trigger that caused the creature to take off with Beaton. This leads us to our second observation: the story does not give the slightest hint that Beaton mistreated the horse, or that he did not conform to local social norms. If anything, the search party that takes place when Beaton does not come home would make the listener infer that the neighbourly network of relationships was working at its best. So while there is an element of reflection on what a crofter's life was like, or should be like – the small size of the farm; the custom of letting horses roam free on the hills when they were not needed, which implies that the community must be close-knit and aware of what animals belong to whom when it is time to gather them; the fact that everyone has a place within the community who act as extended family in cases of crisis – there does not appear to be the kind of moral judgement that Almqvist found in the Irish legends. The third noticeable aspect is the 'gore' the party finds when searching for Beaton – also found in the Loch Frisa instance. It is probably there to indicate the lights, or liver and lungs, or heart and lungs, that are found in waterhorse stories in Ireland and Scotland. These do not constitute isolated cases: half the narratives belonging to this category mention that the man's liver was all that remained to be found, after he had been taken and devoured by the waterhorse.[19]

We are then left with an assemblage of characteristics that poses a slight problem: whereas the 'liver and lungs' motif has been traced back to Irish and Scottish traditions, the 'rider' theme is virtually unknown in Ireland, yet relatively common in Scotland and Sweden. Regardless of any question of direction of the circulation of the stories, a simple, descriptive explanation can be proposed, namely that, in the Nordic countries, the waterhorse is usually benign – if not entirely benevolent. When

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[18] Maclagan Mss: 83 (from A. G., Ardrisaig, Sept. 1893).
[19] Not to mention the 'Children' and 'Seduced Girl' narratives.

the farmer happens to die, he usually drowns, as opposed to being devoured, thus rendering the motif of floating liver and lungs irrelevant.[20] A functional interpretation of this could be put forward, taking into account the seemingly greater integration of the Scandinavian legends into the Christian system of religious values. The fact that the protagonist is able to free himself by pronouncing a powerful, usually Christian word, underlines the strange, 'evil' nature of the horse, while at the same time strongly emphasising the power of God over this kind of creature by allowing the farmer to survive. The word 'parabolical' would probably be too strong to describe the function of these legends, as there is no moral lesson to be learnt from them, yet they undoubtedly present a strong teaching element with religious undertones.

As a result of treating the 'ride' legends as a subtype of the 'workhorse' ones, we are thus able to benefit from an ensemble view; keeping it separated would not allow us to recognise the internal coherence that emerges when looking at the stories as a whole. The element that provides a link between all the subtypes and makes them one coherent type, is, rather appropriately, the kelpie's bridle. As we are about to see, it is the use of the bridle, or alternately its absence, that seems to decide the human protagonist's fate. This should not be perhaps too surprising, as the waterhorse is a supernatural creature, belonging to another world, and should therefore only be approached with great precaution, namely a magic bridle.

The following category, 'Waterhorse caught with a bridle and made to work', represents a larger proportion of stories than the previous one.[21] A total of twenty-one legends is divided between eight narratives in which the waterhorse is used to plough and thirteen in which it is used to cart heavy loads of stones. The details of the capture of the waterhorse are not usually given, except from the fact that a special bridle was used – sometimes this element is only given at the end of the story, to explain how the animal escaped or was freed. The waterhorse is then made to work, seemingly harder than a 'normal' horse would have been, which in some stories, prompted the creation of a rhyme, recited by the waterhorse. Sometimes this rhyme only describes the horse's tired state; sometimes it is a curse on the man who mistreated the kelpie.

> F94.B1.1 – *The Deveron Kelpie*
> A farmer, who had some very heavy improvements on hand, by some stratagem got the brute bridled, and so reduced to servitude. Many a heavy

[20] See Almqvist 1991b: 112. However, the common Nordic tradition seems to be to leave 'the farmer alive to regret the loss of the fabulous animal.' (id.)
[21] The category A represents 27%, while B represents 39%.

> load of stones he made him drive, and, so long as he was bridled, the farmer could catch him and compel him to work. But one day, or night, the kelpie made up to some stroller on the river side, and got him to pet him, and finally relieve him of the bridle. He instantly cantered off snorting out flashes of fire, exclaiming, as he disappeared in a deep pool, 'Sair back and sair banes, cae'd a' Berryley's stanes.' (Yeats 1887: 60-61)

We can note here that no harm befalls the farmer despite the heavy workload assigned to the supernatural creature. This questions that the didactic focus of these legends resides in the teaching of the 'proper' way to handle horses, as seems to be the case in the Irish material. The nature of the work that the waterhorse is compelled to do seems to me a more fruitful lead in regard to the purpose served by these legends. Before the mechanisation of farms, every task would have been performed by men (and women), with the possible help of horses and cattle for ploughing and carting. The conditions could be very harsh, as the description of some 'improvements' undertaken on a farm in Buchan shows: [22]

> My father began his improvements [in the late 1830s] by draining the bogs with stone drains. Part of my first work was to fill the stones into a barrow when the ground was too soft to carry carts, or to hand them to my father as he built the drains. During the [five-year] lease we put in about 4000 yards of these stone drains. The labour and the quantity of stones required – a load to the yard – were immense. (Milne 1889: 164)

Having read this first-hand socio-historical account, it becomes easier to understand the place of the legends in such communities. Presumably, any kind of help would have been welcomed, so that the idea of possessing a supernatural horse, that would do at least part of the men's, at times immensely hard, labour, would have been an appealing one. And all the more so since the usual, normative prescriptions in animal husbandry would not apply to such an un-natural creature.[23] Another consideration to bear in mind is the 'boasting' factor: the taming of wild, supernatural and therefore dangerous, horses could have had the place of hero-tales among men who dealt with real horses as part of their everyday work. It is worth mentioning, in that respect, that the male servant population was one heavily orientated towards the care of animal, and particularly horses, as discussed by Ian Carter (1976). In his article on 'The Peasantry in Northeast Scotland' based mainly on data relating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries data, Carter reports that, in

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[22] The geographical spread of the stories concerning the hard work done by the waterhorse is relatively homogeneous and covers both the Highlands and the Lowlands of Scotland.

[23] An informant entitled his story about the waterhorse carrying off a man into his loch '*Each thar nàduir*' literally 'horse beyond nature' (see Appendix 2 – F94.A1.11).

1861, approximately 80% of male farm servants worked with horses, in jobs ranging from simple horseman to grieve, or foreman. A strong element of competition would certainly have existed between the men, regarding not only the renewal of their contract, but also their personal prestige and reputation within their profession.

> Reputation was of particular importance for a horseman, since the 'horse wark' was both the route to the top positions in farm service and an essential skill for any man to learn who hoped later to take a farm. For these reasons, and also because of the strict work-discipline among horsemen, relations within the ranks of ploughmen were fiercely competitive. This competition went on throughout the year ... but it came to a head at ploughing matches. A horseman cashed in his reputation in the feeing market; but he made that reputation at the ploughing match. (Carter 1979: 151)

The same situation was also described for France by Pierre Jakez Hélias, whose father was one such servant, particularly in relation to the yearly ritual races that have been described in Chapter 5. In the following extract, we are able to appreciate the details of the trade, as the author explains the impact a man's reputation could have on his wages and chances of employment. The honour of running the yearly ritual race was also bestowed on a man according to his reputation, thereby also confirming his skills:

> In fact, the preeminence of the foreman, in certain places, came from the fact that he was responsible for the horse or horses, able to get the best out of them by keeping them in good condition. ... It was also the foreman who rode the finest animal on the farm when races took place, for glory, he as well who drove them into the sea, into the Bay of Audierne, for their yearly ritual bath. (Hélias 1975: 25; my translation)[24]

However, reputation or prestige is not obtained by performing 'easy' tasks so, in the storytelling world at least, the wilder the waterhorse, the better. The following extract from the Reverend Alexander Stewart is as interesting as it is intriguing because it captures well the spirit of *bravoure* attached to the taming of a waterhorse, and at the same time it places the legendary animal on the same level as the real horses that Rarey, the famous American rodeo-rider cited by Stewart, would be dealing with. It is thus constructed in a similar way as the legends it refers to, only outwith the oral narrative frame. Taking his reader as witness, Stewart enjoins:

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[24] 'Du reste, la prééminence du grand valet, en certains endroits, venait du fait qu'il était responsible du cheval ou des chevaux, capable d'en tirer le meilleur en les tenant en bon état. ... C'était aussi le grand valet qui montait la plus belle bête de la ferme quand il y avait des courses, épreuves de prestige, lui qui les faisait entrer dans la mer, en baie d'Audierne, pour le bain rituel de l'année.'

> suggest to a Lochaber or Rannoch Highlander that [this] distinguished American hippothist could clap a saddle on one of the demon steeds of Loch Treig, as he issues in the grey dawn, snorting, from his crystal paved sub-lacustral stalls, and he would answer, with a look of mingled horror and awe, 'Impossible!' The waterhorse would tear him into a thousand pieces with his teeth, and trample and pound him into pulp with his jet black, iron-hard, though unshod hoofs! (1885: 42)

Having read this passage, one can understand how the stories relating the capture and working of the waterhorse would have been seen as demonstrations of the courage and skills of this or that individual.[25]

Finally, and at a more metaphorical level, the stories featuring the over-working of a captured waterhorse could also have been considered as a symbol for servants whose employer did not provide good working conditions. Recriminations could thus be covertly expressed, yet still be understood by fellow servants.[26]

Whatever the meaning or level of analysis of the narratives, one detail remains constant throughout the stories of this subtype: the use of a bridle, usually perceived as 'magic', to catch the waterhorse. Sometimes, however, it was the removal of the bridle from the waterhorse that granted power over it, as the stories in the third category show.

> F94.C.2 *The water horse and the maiden (variant)*
> There was a loch in the Highlands where they would always see a waterhorse. Always when the sun went down in the summer, they would see the horse coming down from the brae of the loch wearing a saddle and bridle, and it would begin to graze amongst the cattle that were out in the nearby glen. There was one clever man in the area, and feared nothing, and he decided that he would try to catch the waterhorse, and would keep it in his own stable. The first thing he did was to go and see an old hag who was staying in the village and he told her what he wanted to do. Now, this old woman was famed for her knowledge of such things, and when he told her what he wanted to do: 'Ah,' she said, 'you'll do that if you wish, the first beautiful evening, after the sun has gone down, you will go out to the brae of the loch and you'll put the skin of a cow around you, and you'll start to move around on your arms and legs amongst the cattle as if you yourself were an animal. When it comes and starts to graze, you'll try to catch it as quickly as you can, and when you get the chance you'll grab hold of the

[25] Interestingly, the occurrence of individuals' names in waterhorse narratives does not seem as rare in Scotland as in Ireland and Scandinavia (Almqvist 1991b: 112).

[26] The rhyme 'sair back and sair banes' could be thus applied to persons who had been working hard, as the Reverent Walter Gregor recorded: 'The old man, who handed down this story to his children, from one of whom I have now got it, used to say to any of them that complained of being tired after a hard day's work: 'Oh, aye, ye're like the kelpie that cairryt the stehns to build the brig o' Innerugie, "sehr back an sehr banes".' (1883: 292; see Appendix 2: F94.B1.2)

bridle. When you get the bridle and saddle you'll ever after be the horse's master.'

This is how it was. The first beautiful evening, the man went out to the glen with the cow skin over his shoulders. When the sun went down, he put the skin across his back and he went crawling amongst the cattle as if he were grazing. It wasn't long at all before he saw the waterhorse coming out from the loch. The waterhorse began to graze with the cattle. The man creeped as quickly as he could over to the waterhorse, waiting for the chance to grab hold of the bridle. All of a sudden the horse came closer to him, and he stood up nimbly and got a grip on the bridle. He caught the saddle and snatched it from the horse's back. When the horse lost the bridle and the saddle, it had no power left, and it would follow the man anywhere. It asked the man to give the bridle and saddle back, but the man would not do that. 'Then,' said the waterhorse to him, 'until I am given the bridle and saddle back by the hand of a maiden, I will be your faithful servant.'

The man went off home, and the waterhorse like a lamb after him. His horse stayed with the other horses, and there was nothing that he would have to do which the horse couldn't do for him. It worked very well and in a short time the man was a wealthy man. People were coming from all over to buy the horse, but he would not sell it no matter what he would get for it. His daughter would always feed the horse in the stable, and ride it towards the water. She had no bridle or saddle, for when her father had brought the horse home, he hid the bridle and saddle in a secret place where he thought no one would ever find it. But this day of days, when the man and his wife left the house, the daughter went as usual to feed the horse, and lo and behold she came across the place where the bridle and saddle were hid. She took both and put them on the horse and was going to take it on a trip before her father and mother returned home. When the horse got the bridle and saddle on its back and the daughter was astride it in the saddle, out it went and others saw it go straight for the loch. When it reached the brae it was heard to shout, 'I got my bridle and saddle back by the hand of a maiden, and now she's mine,' and it leapt out, and neither it nor the daughter were ever seen again. (D. J. MacDonald Mss vol. 13: 1205-1210)

Despite the apparent contradiction in the second- and third-category stories, between having to put the bridle on the waterhorse to secure the help of the animal, and having to remove it, both, I believe, convey the same message. It seems to me that the key to the meaning of the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' narratives in Scotland lies in the presence, or lack, of a magic bridle. In both situations, what we have is an alteration of the nature of the waterhorse, which prevents it from harming the person who caught him. In the first instance, the waterhorse is caught, with the help of a magic bridle, as it is grazing, naked, on dry land. The bridle is used as a means to counteract, as it were, the nature of the horse by acting as 'a sort of charm'.[27] The

[27] Yeats 1887: 60-61 (Appendix 2 – F94.B1.1); see also Appendix 2 – F94.C.3)

denaturation occurs here by addition. Similarly, although in a mirrored way, the second sort of denaturation happens by subtraction. In that instance, the waterhorse is grazing on dry land, as previously, but with his own bridle on. Removing it alters the nature of the waterhorse in so far as he is not 'whole' any longer. Thus, the spell is broken as soon as the supernatural creature regains his bridle, that is to say, as soon as he is made whole again. In both cases, the bridle is used as a medium to protect the human protagonist from interacting directly with the supernatural. Seen in this light, the narratives in which a man simply jumps on the back of a waterhorse cannot but end tragically. The death of the impetuous rider comes as a consequence of the lack of mediation, not so much between two worlds, as between beings of different nature. In this sense, Kilfeather's conclusion that the Irish legends indicate that supernatural forces should not be 'tampered with' (1988: 43), which is a perfectly valid statement in the Irish context, needs to be amended as far as the Scottish context is concerned. Indeed, what the analysis developed above seems to suggest is that the supernatural can only be approached with some sort of precaution, preferably magic, if one is to survive the experience. As was mentioned earlier, the fact that there are legends depicting encounters between man and waterhorse during which nothing happens because of the absence of contact between them, can serve, if indirectly, to emphasise the absolute necessity of mediation. The supernatural and the 'normal' worlds co-exist but do not interact. When they do, either by accident or intention, precautions have to be taken in order to preserve their integrity; we have seen that rituals in the healing process serve this purpose, by creating a safe niche, both in time and space. In the waterhorse legends presented in this first part, the bridle possesses exactly the same function.

The last subtype, constituted of narratives in which contact with the waterhorse is avoided, further illustrates the point made above.

> F94.D.5 – *On the road to Iochdar*
> Once Hector son of John the Smith was away to Gearraidh-bhailteas and going to walk to Iochdar. When he had made a short way down the road, he grew tired and he said to himself that it was a shame that he had no horse and that it would be long before he makes the distance to Iochdar. Hardly had the words left his lips when the grizzled gray horse appeared and lay down on the main road with its back to him, in order that he may climb on. But Hector did not go near it, and he went past it, and reached Iochdar, and the horse did not trouble him any more. (D. J. MacDonald Mss vol. 1: 22)

This short account echoes a comment to the effect that the waterhorse could not get hold of a man unless the latter made the first move against it.[28] I will not expand further on this subtype as nothing really 'happens' – which perhaps is just the lesson intended. When the two characters, who come from worlds of different natures, are kept separate, no harm comes to either of them.[29]

Part 2: Children legends

Legends of the waterhorse involving children seem to exist in Scandinavia and Scotland, but not in Ireland (see Almqvist 1991b). Since the Scottish data were last examined by Donald Archie MacDonald (1991), the number of narratives belonging to this type has tripled, which means, exactly as in the case of the workhorse type discussed above, that it is now time to reassess the material that is now at our disposal. For instance, Almqvist's conclusion that 'it would appear more likely that the legends belonging to the type The Waterhorse as Riding Horse in Scotland [both Children and Grown-Ups] represent the offshoots of Nordic tradition, than that they form the source for the Nordic tradition', is based on the assumption that they are 'only weakly represented in Scotland' (1991b: 119). In view of the material gathered, this assumption does not stand any more – which may, or may not, be of consequence for the conclusion itself. As we will see, the Nordic and Scottish stories differ sufficiently to bring confusion as to where the possible origins of the legends lay.

Here again, the Scottish type presents more variations than the Nordic one. Whereas in the latter all the children escape, the situation in the former is more complex and can be divided into two subtypes. In the first one (F68.A), all the children involved are said to be drowned, sometimes devoured, by the waterhorse; while in the second (F68.B), one child manages to escape his impeding death. The different means of escape are in turn indicated by the numbers B1, B2, and B3.[30] There are, however, two features common to both the Nordic and the Scottish legends. The first one is that the waterhorse can become longer to allow all the

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[28] Stewart 1823: 148.

[29] It has to be noted, however, that in the group of legends 'Waterhorse attacks human being' (*F135), there are three instances of a man being attacked by the creature 'gratuitously', and not at all in retaliation. The man always escapes, either by subduing the animal, which then disappears, or by killing it. These three items form one of two subgroups, the other one concerning girls being attacked by the waterhorse in diverse shapes: in these, one girl at least is killed by the beast. The gender issue will be examined in the next chapter.

[30] 'F68' is the number attributed by Alan Bruford to the Waterhorse and Children legends in the Scottish classification system. Although I have slightly amended the divisions within the type, the number itself did not require to be modified.

children present to mount on its back – up to fifteen children in Scotland, and generally seven in Sweden; and the second is the way the human protagonists stick to the waterhorse as soon as they get in contact with it. These two motifs are also found in Ireland and Wales albeit in a totally different context to that of our legends – the horse is helping the men to go to some strange, faraway place.[31] The question as to whether or not these two clusters, spatially and essentially very distinct, could be related, has not, to my knowledge, been answered. If and when it is examined, the solution to this issue could then perhaps prove useful regarding the direction of dissemination of the waterhorse legends.

In Sweden, the 'Children Ride on the Waterhorse' legends are the most common narratives involving the waterhorse, and they present a strongly formulaic character. Their construction is as follows: children are playing by the water; a handsome horse comes towards them; the children decide to ride it; the horse runs off as soon as they have clambered onto its back; the last child pronounces a 'powerful' word; the horse throws them off and disappears into the water. The nature of the 'powerful' word varies between the name of the beast and a Christian name, both equally acting as a charm protecting the children. For comparative purposes, it could prove rewarding to know the relative numbers and geographical distribution of each of these two different possibilities. Then, not only would an internal analysis be possible – looking, for instance, at perhaps varying degrees of Christianisation within the Scandinavian area – but it would also allow us to check the Nordic data against the Scottish material, where only four narratives, out of the twenty which relate how one child escapes, involve Christianity. This will be further looked into below.

In any case, the Nordic stories incorporate an oral element that is completely absent from the Scottish ones. Sometimes it is used in a manner that lends a slightly comical tone to the narrative, as when the child stutters, which, ultimately, saves the children. This speech impediment represents but an elaboration on the theme of the naming of the creature to take control over it – which seems to represent the relevant factor in the liberation of the children. In the Scandinavian tradition, the name of the waterhorse is *nykur*, which allows for an 'accidental' naming of it, as in the Faroese instance quoted below where the younger child calls out for his brother whose name is Nicholas, which the waterhorse mistakes for its own name.

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[31] The Irish reference comes from a literary romance, *Tóraidheacht an Ghiolla Dheacair* (Almqvist 1991b: 109 and note 6 for further references), in which the riders – who are men not children – use this wonderful horse to go the Otherworld. In Wales, 'Black of the Sea' (*Du y Moroed*) is the name of a 'sea-going' horse that appears in the thirteenth-century copy of an earlier manuscript, carrying 'seven and a half' people across water (Bromwich 1997: 105).

> The [legend] is about some children who mount a nix thinking that it is a horse and the nix dashes towards the lake with them. One of the youngest gets afraid and shouts *Nika baggi* ('Nicholas, brother!), to his brother who is also on the horse. The child could not say Nicholas; the nearest he could get to it was '*Nika*', which is almost the Faroese name for a nix – *nykur*. The nix thought that the child said its name and therefore it lost its power over the children.[32]

It seems a little surprising that the naming motif should be altogether missing from the Scottish material, as it was part of the more general belief system.[33] There is a ready explanation to this: the name of the Scottish waterhorse, 'kelpie', does not provide an obvious play on words or a phonetic similarity with personal Scottish names as 'Nykur' does in Scandinavia. However, this explanation is only partially satisfying, since an artificial process – such as the stuttering of one of the children – could perhaps have been devised, had that type been relevant in the Scottish context. Some Icelandic narratives demonstrate this creative process well. In Iceland, the nykur has another name, *Nennir*, the enunciation of which similarly breaks the spell and enables the intended victim to escape. As 'nennir' does not fit the Christian vocable category, nor sound like a name, another setting was created:

> One time a herd-girl was searching after sheep, and was very tired with walking so far. She then, to her great delight, came upon a grey horse, for which she made a halter with her garter, laid her apron on his back, and proceeded to mount him. But just as she did this, she said 'I don't think I care to (*nenni*) go on its back'. With that the horse started violently, dashed out into a lake near hand, and disappeared. The girl now saw that this was Nykur, for it is his nature that he must not hear his name, otherwise he goes off into his lake, and his other name is *Nennir*. (Craigie 1896: 235)

Here again, different cultural and geographical contexts provide different developments of what is essentially the same story, to serve different purposes.[34] Thus, in the narratives in which Christian terminology provides the 'key' to

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[32] Joensen 1999: 90. He quotes from a collection of Faroese legends published in Danish (Jakobsen 1898-1901, legend 68).

[33] For instance, telling the name of a newly born child before baptism had taken place was avoided, because it was feared that supernatural forces could thus interfere in some way with the baby (see instances in Bennett 1992: 61-64).

[34] Following this same line of argument, I think that Kilfeather might have missed the point when she wrote that, contrary to what is found in the Swedish case, 'Irish terminology does not allow for a rhyme' (1988: 44). Given the fact that the Irish stories, on the whole, end in the death of the farmer, which is used to convey certain ethical values, the presence of a rhyme that saves the man from being taken by the waterhorse would be defying the purpose of the legends. Hence the absence of rhyme in Ireland is, I suspect, more due to the didactic nature of the stories than to the impossibility of creating a relevant rhyme.

neutralise the supernatural and presumably malevolent waterhorse, we can read, as we found in the workhorse legends, an indication of the Christian teachings.

> *Riding the Bäckahäst*
> One beautiful winter evening eight boys were out playing on the frozen surface of a brook. And suddenly there stood a white horse, apparently quite meek, right next to them on the ice. One of the boys was daring, and he crept up on the horse's back and called to the others to do the same. For they were going for a ride! One after the other the boys mounted the horse, and there was still room. But when the eighth got up he glimpsed all the others on the horse in front of him, and he couldn't help saying: 'Jesus Christ, what a long horse!' And in the same moment all eight boys stood in row on the ice and the horse had vanished. But it was just as well that boy happened to mention the name of Jesus; otherwise the horse would have ridden down into the brook with them. That bunch cannot, you see, stand the name of the Savior.[35]

In contrast to the Nordic legends, in which the human protagonists generally survive, almost a third of the Scottish legends involving children end in the drowning of all of them – and all save one in the other part . It was with this fact in mind that I proposed that this type be entitled 'Children Carried Off by the Waterhorse' in the Scottish classification.

> F68.A.5 *Loch-à-ghille*
> Another native gives a variant of this as follows:
> There used to be a water horse in Loch-à-ghille, and I heard them telling of one time, on a sabbath day, a number of children were down about the loch when the water horse happened to be up on the land. Some one said that they should have a ride on the horse, and they were getting up on its back, one after another. As they were getting up, the horse was growing bigger, and bigger, and when they had all got on, away it went with them to the loch, and they were all lost, and never seen after that. (Maclagan Mss: 7323)

The specification of the day on which the children were playing, 'a sabbath day', i.e. Sunday, could mean that the purpose of the story was orientated towards the teaching of religion. In Reformed Scotland, the sabbath day was dedicated to the worship of God, and excluded – indeed condemned – such recreational activities as riding a horse for pleasure. However, only a fifth of the stories from this category present this catechism aspect, which would seem to indicate its optional quality, perhaps an

[35] This story was collected in 1916 in Skåne in South Sweden, where the waterhorse is called *bäckahäst*. The child's exclamation usually takes the form of a rhyme: 'Jussu kors, sickjed et land hors' as rendered in the original dialect translated here (Lindow 1978: 120). In central Sweden, where the waterhorse is called *Näck*, the release mechanism is the same as for *Nennir* and *Nykur*, namely the mispronounciation of a word that resembles the word meaning waterhorse.

evocation of a particuliar period or place.[36] The number of narratives at our disposal does not allow us to attempt to draw any conclusion on this particular aspect of the children legends; my impression is that the breaking of the sabbath element is a late addition to the legends, with no fundamental link to them.[37]

The second subtype of the 'Children Carried Off by the Waterhorse' group represents the majority of narratives involving children in Scotland (see Fig. 7.2 below). It contains legends in which one child manages to escape, constructed in a similar way to those from the first subtype, except for the boy who realises that they are dealing with a waterhorse. In most variants, he then proceeds to cut his finger off, or asks the last child on the horse – sometimes his brother – to do it for him.

> F68.B1.6 *Loch Shin*
> The reciter, who appears to be about fifty-six years of age, and has a strong leaning towards belief in the supernatural, is a native of the parish of Creich, in Sutherlandshire. Talking of water horses, she said:
> I heard people who were up at Loch Shin saying that a water horse used to be seen there. One time, they said, it came up on a sabbath, and some boys went to have a ride on it. There were ten of them, and nine got on the horse's back, but when the tenth was going on, he noticed that his finger, with which he had touched the horse's back, stuck to it, and he tried to get it away but could not; and he was hanging by his finger by the horse's side, while the horse was making for the loch. Just when the horse had almost reached the water, this boy cried to the other boys that were on its back to cut his finger off, and some of them did that, and so he got safely away, all except his finger, which he never saw again. None of his companions could get off, and the horse plunged into the loch with every one of them sticking to it, and they were all drowned. They said that was quite true. (Maclagan Mss: 8054; from Miss Mackay, Creich)

As far as waterhorse narratives are concerned, the motif of cutting off one's finger seems to be found exclusively in Scotland.

Regardless of the manner in which one of the children escapes, the number of the instances composing this subtype (69% – twenty stories) is one of the reasons why the Christian function does not seem to be applicable to Scottish narratives, in so far as the salvation of only one child does not tally well with the otherwise soteriological

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[36] Out of the three narratives with a seemingly religious purpose, two come from the west coast of Sutherland, the most northern part of mainland Scotland. This could denote a regional trend, perhaps related to the influence of Norse settlements?

[37] Cf. Appendix 2 – F68.B2.2: *Water horse in Lochan-larig-eala*. At the end of this story, in which one of the children escapes by swinging off the horse, the author gives another version in which the lucky one owes his life to having some pages of the Bible in his pocket. He concludes: 'This version has a too modern look about it, and we know that the old Highlanders were not very strict Sabbatarians. So much for the water horse.' (MacDiarmid 1902: 130)

vocation of Christianity. Another argument, which applies to the whole group of stories, is the fact that it is not always present. If the religious content of the legends constituted their *raison d'être*, one would expect to meet it, if not in every story, then at least in a majority of them: this is not the case as it is found in less than half of the total of narratives.

In a comparatively small number of variants (four items), the boy directly owes his life to carrying a Bible or New Testament with him.[38]

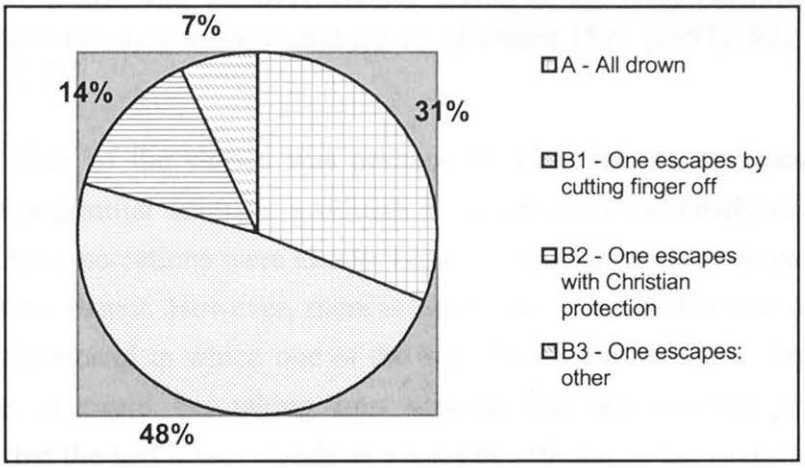

Fig. 7.2 – Distribution of the variants of the migratory legend type F68: 'Children Carried off by the Waterhorse'

Lastly, two stories stand out when compared with these two sets of variants. We are told that one boy saved his life when he managed to catch the waterhorse's tail and swing over the animal – an unusual escape even when compared with Nordic stories, which perhaps points to a relatively recent transformation of this particular narrative (Appendix 2 – F.68.B3.1; F68.B3.2).

If, as I have proposed above, the Christian element is not the most relevant aspect of these legends, what, then, was their main purpose? The motif of the horse getting longer and longer is used in Scotland only in the children stories, which would seem to indicate that they were primarily destined for a young audience. In an interview with Anne Ross, her informant Lexy Walker, from Fortingall near Loch Tay (Perthshire), told her that, as a child, she and the other children used to be threatened with the waterhorse 'if they weren't well-behaved' (Appendix 2 – F4.C.8). It was

[38] It has to be noted that in one of them, the boy did so on the recommandation of an old cailleach, who insisted that it would 'act as a protective charm against all evil' – which recalls more the magical practices discussed in Chapter 3, than orthodox Christian ones (Appendix 2 – F68.B2.2).

also used to prevent children from going too close to the water, as we learn from Margaret Bennett's mother, who was brought up on the Isle of Skye:[39]

> My mother used to frighten us ... there was a burn, a stream running down not too far from our house. ... And it ran down to the river. Well, it was very steep going down to the river and of course she would always be busy, you know, there was such a lot to do. And so that we wouldn't go near this river she would say to us (in Gaelic of course!) 'Now if you go near that river the water horse will get you', and we believed every word of it. '*Na teid faisg air an amhuinn no beiridh an t-each uisg' ort*'. ... Oh well, this is what we heard, and we were always scared of the river because we were convinced the *each uisge* would get us. (Bennett 1997 [1991]: 95; Appendix 2 – F4.C.7)

Another function of the stories was perhaps to teach the young ones to exercise caution with unfamiliar animals: a skittish horse could be extremely dangerous to a child. All these associations were almost certainly present in children narratives, to a lesser or greater extent. However, there is hardly any clue in this line of analysis to account for the stories in which one of the boys has to cut his stuck finger off to set himself free. It could be, taking into account the otherworldly nature of the waterhorse, that the lost finger stands as a kind of offering to the preternatural forces the horse represents. Although this parallels the narratives in which men are carried off because they did not protect themselves from the supernatural, there is no real proof for this so it will remain at the stage of conjecture. A simpler, though related, interpretation could be that these stories illustrate the principle that sometimes one has to make a small sacrifice in order to preserve a bigger, more important, stake.

Another point of interrogation concerning the type as a whole is that, when girls and boys are included in a story, the survivor is always a boy. This gender issue is all the more intriguing as it does not exist in the Nordic narratives. The relation with religion that has been found in the latter makes the lack of discrimination normal; if the point to these stories is to 'prove' or emphasise the power of Christ, gender considerations are not relevant. And conversely, this very point could, I think, be brought in against a religious function of the children narratives in Scotland.

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[39] This kind of threat was also recorded for East Scotland by A. Ross, whose informant William Forbes, from Perthshire, remembered that 'as children, people frightened them into staying from burns, by saying the water horse would catch them.' (Appendix 2 – F4.C.9)

Conclusion

Several different points can be made, based on the material that has been presented here. I shall begin with the national, or geographical, characteristics that have emerged from the comparative studies of the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' narratives from Ireland, Sweden (and more generally the Nordic countries), and lastly Scotland. In Ireland, tales of a supernatural horse caught to help with the ploughing end in the death of the farmer, and seem to have a didactic function, centred on prescriptions of a mainly moral order. In Sweden, neither the 'Grown-ups Ride on the Waterhorse', nor the workhorse stories present a tragic outcome for the farmer, and, as I have suggested, the reason might be looked for in the way they have been integrated into the religious system. In Scotland, however, the decisive factor as to the human's fate lies with his way of interacting with a supernatural, otherworldly creature. It should be noted that this holds only for the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' narratives; for other groups of waterhorse migratory legends found in Scotland, namely 'Children Carried off by the Waterhorse', and 'Waterhorse as Young Man Seduces Girl',[40] different lessons are meant to be learnt from different plots and motifs. To continue, I should like to add a note of caution regarding whether the Scottish workhorse stories serve a strictly didactic purpose. As I have remarked, the role of the bridle appears when the narratives are taken as a whole, which would hardly represent the situation in which they were told. So it is perhaps more a case of using a trait of the supernatural, which would have been well-known to a Scottish audience.[41] This could, perhaps, be paralleled by the way an Irish audience would have been aware of the propensity shown by water creatures to return to their original element when put in contact with it – if the resemblance I suggested earlier is valid. However, there is no denying that the stories had a cathartic function in letting out men's frustrations, and that helped to provide some relief from everyday hard work. It could even be argued that some of the accounts, in their depiction of the skills required to master the waterhorse, were a patent tribute to the knowledge and ability that horsemanship demanded.

Both sub-divisions of the 'Waterhorse as Riding Horse' (Children and Grown-ups, as defined by Egardt in 1944) are lacking in Ireland, but do exist in Scotland; although this information was not available when Egardt or Almqvist wrote their articles on the subject (1944 and 1991 respectively). Even though the plots and

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[40] This heading combines distinct types of migratory legends, which are found, so far as I know, exclusively in Scotland.

[41] Certainly the danger presented by unmediated contact with the Otherworld, and the precautions to take in order to placate the preternatural forces, were known and applied in other 'domains' of folk beliefs, such as those associated with healing. It could therefore have been assumed as a 'given' on the part of the storytellers, and not constitute a 'lesson' at all.

motifs are strikingly similar, the endings are markedly different. In Scandinavia, children, men and women (the last two not found in Scotland) escape drowning by pronouncing the name of the waterhorse (Nykur, Nennir) or the name of God (or other sacred Christian word). In Scotland, however, the main way for a child to save himself is to cut off the finger that has stuck to the waterhorse (the 'Bible' stories are quite obviously late variations). I have found these children narratives comparatively opaque, in terms of functionality and also because they seem to lack the consistency throughout the entire group that characterises the workhorse legends. It is perhaps an indication that I first thought of these stories as folk *tales* and not *legends*, having in mind Max Lüthi's remark on the folktale hero, which seemed to fit extremely well the motif of the child cutting his finger off. He writes:

> It is as if the persons of the folktale were paper figures from which anything at all could be cut off without causing a substantial change. As a rule such mutilations call forth no expressions of physical or psychological suffering. ... [P]eople cut off their limbs without batting an eye. (1986 [1947]: 13)

The recurrent motif of the children sticking to the horse has itself been recognised as an international folktale motif, occurring in diverse types of folktales, with different aims.[42] It seems extremely likely, therefore, that the two genres, folktale and legend, are in fact combined, in this particular type of oral narrative tradition. Indeed, Scottish children narratives display both the characteristics of the legendary – the proximity and intrusion of the otherworld into the real world – and some aspects that are more typical of folktales, as has just been argued. This perspective can, if not explain, then at least account for their complex nature.

As to the reason why this combination should be present in, and restricted to, children narratives, it may have to do with the nature of tales and legends, as much as with the figure of the waterhorse. Legends seem to me to be directed more towards adults, or young adults, as they essentially set out to teach codes of conducts, beliefs, local history and so on. Folktales by contrast are more associated with youngsters, and have been said to deal more with universals, general societal rules (the taboo of incest, or filial duties to name but two).[43] If we also take into account the familiarity of the waterhorse in the Scottish imagination, we then have all the 'ingredients' for this particular recipe. Children would have known the waterhorse as something to be

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[42] The 'All Stick Together' motif corresponds to the number 571 in A. Aarne and S. Thompson's index (1987 [1961]), and is used in the 'Goose' tales to recognise a thief, while in other tales it is a means to make a princess laugh, etc.

[43] See for instance B. Bettelheim's analysis (1976); see also Lévi-Strauss (1973), especially pp. 152-157; 235-249; 301-315 for the link between myths and tales, and their respective roles within the community.

afraid of – and by extension would have avoided going too close to water – and the folktale elements would also have entertained them, as well as being a familiar form of narration.[44]

On the whole, it seems that, in Scotland, both types of legend – 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' and 'Children Carried off by Waterhorse' – allow human protagonists an alternative: they can die or survive. By contrast, Irish legends mostly present a tragic outcome, whilst, on the contrary, the Scandinavian ones deny the waterhorse any victim. As I hope I have shown, this variety not only illustrates the diverse geographical background to these stories, but also their different functions and possible meanings. As we shall see in the next chapter, other types of legends of the waterhorse offer yet more scope for finding how folklore and legends can act as a window on broader cultural norms and institutions.

[44] An example of this incursion of the waterhorse in the folktale domain is given in Appendix 2 – Miscellaneous: 1. The narrative, which displays motifs clearly identifiable as belonging to the genre 'folktale' (AT number 451 – 'The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers'), is nevertheless given a legendary tone by introducing the waterhorse.

CHAPTER 8

A SCOTTISH DEVELOPMENT: 'THE WATERHORSE AS SEDUCER'

Introduction

We have been dealing so far in this section of the thesis, first with the range of waterhorse narratives in Scotland and their place in both a national and an international classification system, and second with the types that are common to Scotland and other countries of the Nordic area. In this chapter, we are going to treat various other types of legend, which, in contrast to the two types we have just examined, seem to be exclusive to Scotland.[1] It should be noted here that the Scottish distinctiveness resides mainly in the waterhorse's ability to take a human shape, and partly in the narratives in which it features. The structure of the legends, for its part, tends to fit in a general legendary pattern, and, as we shall see, two of the types have parallels both in the Migratory Legend and international Folktale classification systems.

As suggested previously, the different types involved can be regrouped under the general heading of the 'The Waterhorse as Seducer' (MLST 4088), and each will be presented in detail in the course of this chapter. Where before men and children were the human protagonists, the legends now solely concern women. The main plot line involves the waterhorse taking the shape of a dark handsome young man, in order to seduce a girl and then try to lure her and take her back into his loch with him. However, there is not one single form of resolution of these stories, as the girl sometimes escapes, sometimes is carried off and, at other times still, dies of fright in the safety of her home.

The different types will be presented in three parts. In the first part of the chapter, we will be looking at two types together – F56 'Other Tales of Supernatural Beings Foiled or Driven Away' and F143 '*Mi fhéin*' – because the plot of the latter is essentially the same as that described in the former.[2] In the second part of this chapter, I shall develop the analysis started in the first, regarding in particular the different modes of interaction between the supernatural and the human worlds, and the rules they seem to follow. I have taken the decision not to present the types and categories in the order in which they appear in the classification and in the corpus –

[1] The one exception is the Faroe Islands (see above in Chapter 7), and it seems more than likely that it arrived there from Scotland.

[2] Ultimately, it is possible that they will be merged into a single category, as a consequence of a re-organisation of the Scottish system of classification.

which is, after all, essentially arbitrary – but rather to address them as and when they are relevant to my argument. In the third part, we will see how F57 'Waterhorse as Young Man Seduces Girl; They Have Children; She Escapes (He Composes a Lullaby)' could perhaps be interpreted as an illustration of certain marriage practices, themselves forming a part of a wider type of social organisation.

Part 1 – 'Myself and myself': Outwitting the Supernatural

> F143.7 *Grey hair kelpie*
> Another story about the Kelpies is as follows: – One night a shepherd's wife was making her husband's supper while he was fishing on a small lake near the house. While she was busy at this a very handsome young man came into the house and sat down on a chair. He then commenced speaking to her and asked what was her name. She answered '*Mi fein 's mi fein*'. The woman noticed through a loose jacket and shirt he had on that his breast was covered with long grey hair and by this she knew him to be a kelpie. She was making porridge when he came in and when she was going to dish it she suddenly clapped the pot on his head. He ran out yelling and by his yells attracted his father who came out of the lake and asked who hurt him. He said '*Mi fein 's mi fein*'. Then the father said 'If any other Kelpie or any human being hurt you I would have my revenge but since you hurt yourself you may bear the pain.' (CW 88, ff. 29-30; from Hugh Tolmie).

This story is found principally in the Western Isles. The details of the story can vary; sometimes the scalded waterhorse complains not to his father but to his mother, and sometimes the pot that is being boiled is filled with water rather than porridge. These variations are only minor however, and are not important in relation to the general theme. The plot of the 'Myself' narratives has been indentified with the Polyphemus motif, classified by Stith Thompson under the number K602: '"Noman" – Escape by assuming an equivocal name' (1932-1936, vol. 4: 344).[3] This refers of course to the passage in Homer's *Odyssey* in which Odysseus escapes the cyclops Polyphemus after having blinded him. The brothers of Polyphemus, alarmed by his yells, ask him who harmed him, only to discover that 'Noman' (or nobody, *nemo*) did it, this being the name under which Odysseus had presented himself to the giant.

The variants of this legend that are best known in Scotland involve a woman alone in her house, who gets rid of her inopportune guest by scalding him. These narratives

[3] As noted in the Introduction and in the classification table in Chapter 6, this Scottish type (F143) is generally given the Aarne-Thompson number 1137, which corresponds to the 'Tales of the Stupid Ogre'. This tale-type seems however to be focusing more on the 'blinding of the eye', which is never mentioned in our waterhorse narratives. Therefore, it would perhaps be more helpful to refer to the Stith Thompson motif (K602), as Bruford did in his summary of the type (1997 [1991]: 129).

appear to be straightforward cases of what one could call 'self-defence' action, as the passage presented above illustrates well. The woman reacts to unwanted attentions with the means that are at her disposal, in an apparently un-premeditated manner. However, I would contend that there is more to these narratives within the Scottish context than a straightforward case of deceiving the supernatural being in order to escape from its attentions.

It has to be noted that the protagonist is a married woman, as opposed to a girl, or a maiden, who usually features in the other 'Waterhorse as Seducer' legends. This emphasis on the marital status of the woman involved in the stories is quite systematic. The narratives picture either a married woman, inside her house, or a maiden, outside in the hills. I will deal here with the first term of the pair, as the girls do not appear in the 'Myself' narratives and will be examined later in the following parts of the chapter. In the stories, we meet the woman while she is performing one of her daily tasks as a wife, sometimes a mother, namely: cooking. That is to say, she is literally transforming raw material into cooked food, through the intermediary of the fire, of the hearth. This deceptively simple setting puts in place two sets of binary oppositions.

The first one concerns the supernatural and real worlds, the divide between the two symbolised here by the act of cooking. Indeed, the supernatural essence of the waterhorse is emphasised by the fact that he does not seem to fear the fire, because of his ignorance of it. The general understanding that supernatural beings have not mastered the art of fire is expressed in other legends or tales of the supernatural in Scotland, in which a girl captured, or rescued by a strange man, is being fed only raw food, which is how she is said to realise that he does not belong to the human world. This motif is also found in one of the waterhorse stories (Appendix 2 – F57.2) and is clearly there to indicate the alien nature of the waterhorse.[4]

Secondly, as has been demonstrated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, raw food is associated with nature (the non-civilised), while cooked food is the privilege of culture (1964: 340-341). In Scottish tradition, this is conveyed by the role of the hearth. In order to determine how the image of the hearth is used as a symbol indicative of the civilised vs. uncivilised dichotomy, I shall make an incursion into a neighbouring field of folklore, that which is concerned with life-cycle customs. To be exact, the symbolic nature of the hearth is conveyed by a marriage custom called 'footwashing'. It was performed on the night before the wedding, and saw the

[4] In Misc. 5, the waterhorse as a young man seizes a ploughshare heated in a fire until it was 'red-hot' thinking he was shaking the hand of a woman. This made him catch fire and disappear.

bridegroom getting his feet smeared, originally with soot.[5] James M. MacPherson noted that 'the soot with which the limbs were smeared was believed to possess magical virtue as connected with the hearth and fire, and may have been held to neutralise the mutual dangers of contact' (1929: 117). This custom drew on a cluster of oppositions, one of which places the inside world (associated with the domestic, married life) against the outside world (associated with bachelors). Smearing the limbs of the groom with soot from the hearth can be read as a metaphor for his gradual entrance into the domestic sphere. The 'mutual dangers of contact' mentioned by MacPherson arise from the union of two different, even opposite, worlds: the world of the groom (dominated by associations with the wild sphere, the hunting of untamed animals) and the female world (strongly associated with the domestic sphere, the breeding of tame animals). To go back to our stories, we can see how, in all events, the presence of the hearth and of fire protect the woman from the intrusion of the supernatural, the epitome of the wild, untamed world. Anticipating slightly the discussion to follow on the status of the maidens as described in the other stories, we can conclude the first part of our argument by saying that the married woman is in possession of the means to defend herself against the supernatural in a way that a single girl is not, as marriage has placed her in a certain position of power.[6]

There is more. As we shall see now, the protective aspect of marriage extends further than the symbolic weight of the institution. In a variant collected in Lewis, the narrative develops around the husband taking the place of his wife who had been visited by the waterhorse.[7]

> F143.4 *The Water Horse*
> The Gaelic version of this story seems to me to be much nearer the original than the English version. The outlines of the Gaelic story thus runs. The young '*Each-Uisge*' was annoying a family in Carishadair in the absence of 'Fear-an-tighe'. By the advice of the local *oracle*, '*fear-an-tighe*' was to don his wife's clothes and to watch for the arrival of the young water-horse. And when the young water-horse made his appearance and inquired in the door who was in, he was to reply, '*Mi-féin-us-mi-féin*' i.e. Myself-and-myself, and at the same time to invite him to come forward to the fire, and to watch his opportunity to scald him. He in any particular literally followed out the instructions received. The young water-horse ran away from the house

[5] This custom is still performed, although the soot has been replaced nowadays by shoe polish (see instances of modern footwashing 'ceremonies' in Bennett 1992: 103-115).

[6] M. Daraki summed up well the role of marriage in ancient Greece describing its function as one of 'humanisation', as it sanctioned the human element within man, and rid him of his wildness ('*sauvagerie*' ; 1994 [1985]: 77).

[7] I have found this form of the story only in the Carmichael-Watson papers, and always linked to an unnamed family from Carishader in Lewis.

> screaming with pain. His father the old water-horse asked him what had befallen him and who did it. He replied myself and myself had scalded him. His father the old water-horse replied: 'If another man had done it, it's I that would avenge it'.
> Hence the proverb.[8] (CW 5: f. 56)

The Lewis stories, with their motif of the husband disguising himself in order to trick the waterhorse, seem to be following a more elaborate structure than the other F143 legends. By more elaborate, I mean that the waterhorse is overcome after advice has been sought from 'the local oracle' as in the story above, and not as a direct reaction to an unexpected situation. The narrative makes the listener infer, for it does not always supply the information, that the waterhorse has been visiting the woman on previous occasions, and that the husband has decided to take matters into his own hands. In that respect, and apart from the presence of the 'Myself' motif and of the scalding of the waterhorse, the Lewis variants seem to me to be closer, in structure, to the F56 narratives.

The motif of the subterfuge is also found, by definition, in the legends catalogued under F56 'Supernatural Suitor Tricked or Foiled'. The following extract illustrates well the resemblance between this type and the Lewis legends, as the ploy is essentially the same:

> F56.A.2 *The Water-Horse*
> The water-horse was in the habit of coming to visit a particular woman when she was alone. Her man put on a woman's clothes and he began to spin a distaff. The water-horse came as usual. He showed up at the door. When he saw who is in, he would not come further. But he started to say:
> 'That distaff that you have there
> And a beard on your mouth'. (CW 5: f. 24a)

Here, the disguise appears to be as effective as in the previous instance, albeit in a different manner. Whereas in the 'Myself' legend the waterhorse is fooled by the disguise and the plot unfolds as if he was in the presence of the woman he had come to court, in the second type the waterhorse recognises that he is dealing with the man of the house, which is indicated in the verse. The effect obtained, however, is the same; he does not dare enter the house and the woman is, presumably, rid of her unwanted suitor.

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[8] The reference to the proverb ('If another man/someone else had done it, it is I that/who would avenge it') points to a characteristic of waterhorses narratives – whatever their type – which is that they were sometimes constructed as an explanatory background for a proverb. This is clearly illustrated in Appendix 2 – F58.A.6; F58.B.15; F143.1; F143.3.

One could argue, perhaps, that the two types of legend that we have been discussing here only reflect simple trial of strength and of seduction between all the protagonists involved. The waterhorse discrimates between a woman he has come to seduce and her husband in whom he is not interested and who might, moreover, use violence against him (Appendix 2 – F143.1) I feel, however, that following only this line of argument would prevent us from seeing the wider implications of these legends, in particular the beliefs related to the supernatural they allude to. Indeed, we are able to see how, when the plot features the meeting between the waterhorse and a woman, we are dealing with a straightforward case of the irruption of one world into the other; there the situation is resolved through the presence, in the tales, of recognisable social and cultural codes. Although the conclusion to the legends involving the 'man of the house' also points to the 'victory' of the couple against the waterhorse, the replacement of the woman by her husband can possibly tell us something more about the beliefs mentioned above.

When the man disguises himself as his wife, he thus effectively turns himself into something he is not, that is to say, into an un-natural being, which in a sense, changes the assumption on which the legend is based and is supposed to work. The waterhorse certainly is defeated, but for different reasons than the ones already presented. This is indicated, in the 'distaff and beard' instance quoted, by the statement that the waterhorse 'would not come further' and enter the house. One way to explain this sudden restraint is that he has been deprived of his quarry, and no longer needs to enter; or, it could alternatively be proposed that the waterhorse has been deprived of his prerogative as the only supernatural being in the legend – he has become powerless. It seems to me that, as soon as the waterhorse is not the only protagonist in the story to be depicted as having a double nature, then the general purpose of legends 'to shock or to teach a lesson', as defined by M. Lüthi (1986 [1942]: 2; quoted earlier in Chapter 6), becomes clouded and loses some of its potency. In other words, the accumulation of the supernatural in a legend makes it more like a tale.

The issue of the supernatural power of the waterhorse is perhaps even more clearly exposed in another legend, involving a maiden, and a dog that turns out to be supernatural.[9] There, we have two supernatural beings, which, like two negative forces, cancel each other out to leave the girl unharmed in the morning.[10] In the

[9] The dog helps the maiden, who has stopped to spend the night in a strange bothy because of nightfall, by giving her advice. She follows the dog's advice and manages to delay the waterhorse until day dawns and it disappears without harming her (Appendix 2 – F56.A.1).

[10] It might be of interest to compare these legends with other legends of the same type, but not featuring the waterhorse. I am thinking in particular to the legends in which a supernatural being is

story, the dog advises the maiden that she should send the waterhorse on several errands for her. This situation is once more reminiscent of the folktale realm, if in an inverted way; the anti-hero is asked to perform tasks that he cannot complete, but here his failure becomes the salvation of the endangered heroine! Quite apart from this type of relation to folktales, the use of another source of supernatural power to neutralise and drive away the waterhorse is found as well in the legends involving a fight between a bull reared especially for that purpose and the kelpie. I shall now develop this point further, alongside a discussion of the other legends belonging to the same type.

Part 2 – 'Let the Bull loose': Rules of interference between the supernatural and human worlds

I shall start the study of the third type involved, F58 'Waterhorse as Young Man Meets Girl; Rests his Head on her Lap/Asks her to Comb his Hair; She Realises what he is and Runs Away', by the examination of the sub-type F58.C: 'Bull let loose to fight the waterhorse'.

> F58.C.1 *Tarbh na leòid*
> There is an island a few miles west of Uist that they call Heisker and it's a low-lying island with little water. In summer, when the water was scarce, the women used to go out to do their washing in a loch some distance from the village. They went out two at a time, for it was said that a water-horse lived in this loch. It was also said by an old man in the place that it could happen that the water-horse would come to the village and that it might do fearful harm, and he advised the people to rear a bull and never to let it out of doors in case it might be needed some day.
>
> But this year, anyway, whatever the reason, there was one woman who went out alone to do her washing. She finished her washing and she was tired and it was a fine warm evening and there was a sunny little knoll there and she lay down on the side of the knoll. When she had been there for a little while, she saw a fine-looking, handsome man approaching. He came right over to the place where the woman was and he said what a fine evening it was. She said it was indeed.
>
> 'You're pretty tired', said he, 'after all your washing'.
>
> 'Oh yes', said she.
>
> 'Ah, I'm pretty tired myself', said he. 'Would you have any objection', said he, 'if I sat beside you and took a rest?'
>
> 'Oh, I don't mind at all', said the woman.

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tricked into giving advice on how to get rid of a supernatural suitor, thereby giving the means to keep him away (I. Paterson recorded one instance in Harris [SA1968.184.B6] and A. Bruford recorded two versions in Orkney [SA1970.229.B13; SA1971.262.A2]). This is, quite literally, a case in point where the use of supernatural means to defeat a supernatural being is represented.

He sat down beside her and when he had been sitting beside her for a while he said to her:

'I'm getting sleepy', said he. 'Would you have any objection', said he, 'if I laid my head in your lap?'

'Oh, I don't mind', said the woman.

The man laid his head in the woman's lap and when she had been looking at him for a while, she noticed that there was gravel from the loch among his hair, and water weeds. She looked at him more closely then and she suddenly noticed that he had hooves for feet and it was then that she realised who she had there – it was the water-horse.

He was fast asleep and snoring now, and she didn't know what on earth she should do. But she had a pair of scissors in her pocket and she took them out and cut a circle out of her coat where the water-horse's head was resting and she managed to slip away cautiously, but when she got a little way off she took to her heels.

She was getting near the village but it wasn't long till she heard a neighing behind her and looked back, and there was the water-horse coming, and coming pretty fast at that.

Apparently the man who was in charge with this bull that they were keeping in case the water-horse came, his name was MacLeod and the bull was called *Tarbh na Leòid.* When she was getting close to the village she began to shout:

'Turn loose *Tarbh na Leòid*!' she cried. 'Turn loose *Tarbh na Leòid*!'

Some people in the village heard the shouting and the bull was let loose and some others went out to meet the woman. The bull and the water-horse met and hurled themselves upon each other. Sometimes the water-horse seemed to be winning, and sometimes the bull seemed to be winning, but at last the bull started to drive the water-horse back and he drove him out into the sea at last and they both disappeared.

The woman went home and took to her bed and it is said that she never rose again.

But a long time after that a horn – one of the bull's horns was washed ashore, and it is said that it was used for a great many years as a bar across a gateway in Heisker, and it's not so very long ago since some people saw it – a little over ... just about forty years ago, it's said it was still to be seen in Heisker. (SA 1956.159.3; from Donald MacDougall, Malacleit, North Uist).

The 'Bull' narratives are longer than the other legends grouped under the F58 category, and the majority of them locate the story in Haskeir, a very small island off the west coast of North Uist in the Hebrides. There are two points in particular that I would like to make with reference to these narratives.

The first one follows the discussion started in the previous part of this chapter, in which I proposed that, as soon as another supernatural – or at least un-natural – element is introduced in the plot, the story ends without any further development as to the fate of the woman involved. This is exactly the case here as well. What begins

as a 'classic' narrative of the waterhorse in the form of a young man seducing a girl ends in a furious fight between two supernatural animals, and the fate of the girl is completely ignored. The settings have changed, and she is not relevant any more.

My second point is more a question regarding whether the legends in this category can be thought to be Scottish or were of Nordic origin, as Bruford implied when he linked these legends to Christiansen's 4085 category, 'Seahorse and Seaserpent':

> 4085, The Seahorse and the Seaserpent, is paralleled not in the Northern Isles but in the Western, with the story of a water-horse overcome by an extraordinary bull called *Tarbh na Leòid* – apparently 'Ljót's bull' rather than MacLeod's. The tale includes native Gaelic tradition – the water-horse can become a young man and lives in a fresh-water loch – but the name of the loch, *Snigreabhad*, seems to derive from Norse **nykra-vatn*, 'water-horse loch', so the belief if not the whole story may be handed down from Norse times. (Bruford 1986: 173)

While it seems that the etymology of the Gaelic expression does indeed relate the story to the Norse dialect, the conclusion, taking into account only the linguistic aspect of the legend, may have been drawn a little precipitately. In view of the comparative data on the waterhorse narratives in the various Nordic countries, Bruford's note that the waterhorse's human shape is a 'native Gaelic tradition' can now be amended, since we have seen that the human shape is not only to be found in Gaelic tradition, but is indeed exclusive to Scotland. As for the idea that the belief may have been 'handed down from Norse times', it is now, I think, open for discussion – notably in view of the evidence discussed in the two previous chapters regarding the direction of travel of some of these migratory legends. On the one hand, the belief in the waterhorse seems to have travelled from Scotland and Ireland to Iceland ('Waterhorse as Workhorse'), and on the other hand, the belief, or rather the motif, of the waterhorse in the shape of a young man is found, outside Scotland, only in the Faroe Islands. Furthermore, I have never come across a fight between the waterhorse and a seaserpent in the Scottish tradition. In addition, the outline given by Christiansen in his catalogue of migratory legends features a seahorse fighting against the seaserpent to rid people of the seaserpent. The horse occupies, in the Norwegian stories, the role played by the bull in the Scottish instances. It would therefore appear that the belief was not brought to Scotland by the Scandinavians. However, the issue of where the story might first have originated still needs to be addressed.

Let us start with the hypothesis that the Scandinavian settlers did indeed bring the story with them. The present evidence at our disposal, through the narratives

collected, is that it must have been, in time, appropriated by the people and integrated into the local legendary lore, until it became a fully 'Scottish' legend. The main problem I find with this hypothesis is one linked to the question of belief: while the settlers could have brought with them one of their own Nykur stories, and named the loch after it, it seems extraordinary that they would create a legend containing the motifs of the local traditions about the waterhorse.

Other constituents of the narratives can also be fruitfully drawn into the discussion to address the issue of origin. The motif of the girl finding loch weeds and/or sand in the hair of the young stranger who has come to meet her is common to all the stories found in F58. Some of the narratives even go as far as describing how the man asks the girl if he can lay his head in her lap, 'in a fashion not unusual in old times' (MacPhail 1896: 400; see Appendix 2 – F58.A.6).[11] This bucolic scene almost always takes place as the maiden is taking a rest from the work she has been sent to do in the hills – or at least outside the village – tending to the cattle or washing linen. There we have a perfect integration of the story into the daily working life as it was known at least until the end of the eighteenth century (see Fenton 1999: 138). This also tallies very well with the settings of the other legends in which the waterhorse takes the shape of a young man. Again, the comparison of the background to the 'Bull' stories with these other legends points toward their Scottish origin.

As further examples of the different plots in which a maiden is courted by the waterhorse, I shall now turn to the two other sub-categories of the type F58, which unfold without the intervention of any supernatural being other than the waterhorse. By contrast to the situation presented in the 'Myself' stories, the maidens courted by the waterhorse are generally depicted outside in the hills, often near a loch, tending to the cattle and sewing, an activity symbolically associated with the young women, not yet married, as we have seen in Yvonne Verdier's analysis of the use of pins (Chapter 3).[12] While in the first group the girl manages to run to safety (F58.A), in

[11] The innocent phrasing 'laying his head on her lap', which is found most often, could mask a less anodine behaviour, as found in one version (Appendix 2 – F58.C.6). In this narrative, the waterhorse in his young man shape asks the girl to '*fasg*' his hair. There are two possible meanings for the word, which is found under '*faisg*'. The first one, is spellt '*fàisg*' and means 'squeeze, wring ... as water out of a cloth'; the conjugated form is '*fàsgadh*'. The second option is '*faisg*; *fasgaidh*', which means 'pick off vermin'. Interestingly, we possess two forms of the story, which figures both in Campbell's unedited manuscript, and in the published collection. While in the latter, Campbell – or his publisher – paraphrased it as 'she began to arrange his locks, as Neapolitan damsels also do by their swains', the manuscript kept the verb, untranslated: 'So she kept her terror on herself, and worked away at this 'fasgadh' till the man fell fast asleep'. The discrepancies in the spelling make it difficult to dispel this ambiguity, and all the more so since both types of requests would be equally fitting for the waterhorse.

[12] In two narratives (Appendix 2 – F58.A.3 and F58.A.4), the waterhorse meets a woman while she is alone in her house. Although each refers to 'a woman' as the protagonist, as opposed to 'girl', in one of the variants, it is also said that she 'was living alone'. This places her in a similar situation to being a girl, which is, I believe, relevant to the type. Such variations do not invalidate the point I would like

the second group (F58.B), the legends describe how the girl, who had escaped, is finally caught by the waterhorse who then carries her away into his loch where he devours her.

> F58.A.5 *Water horse in Loch Frisa*
> The reciter is an old man over eighty, and a native of the south end of the island of Mull. He said:
> The water horse that was in Loch Frisa used to change sometimes into the shape of a man. One time it did that, and it came up to a woman that was sitting a little distance from the edge of the loch. It spoke to her, and sat down beside her. She did not notice at first, but after a while, the man, as she thought he was, said he was wearied, and lay down, and put his head in her lap. She then noticed sand, and things among his hair, and she began to suspect that he was not a right man. She got a great fright, but managed to keep quiet. As fortune would have it, she happened to have a pair of scissors with her, and she quietly clipped away the part of the apron, and petticoats on which his head was lying, and slipping herself clear of him, she made off, and when she looked after her, she saw that he had again changed back to a horse, and he went into the loch. (Maclagan Mss: 7683; from Malcolm Macgillivray, Tobermory)

Sometimes the waterhorse is said to be running after her, or neighing so loudly in frustration that it could be heard in villages miles away... In any event, the girl flees, cutting her clothes to escape, or simply leaving behind her apron and petticoat. The interaction between supernatural and human is not further developed and, if a lesson has to be taken from these narratives, it does not seem to extend beyond exercising caution in one's dealings with strangers. They reproduce to a certain extent the structure found in the 'waterhorse left alone' group of the 'Waterhorse as Workhorse' legends (F4.D): nothing really happens. The second sub-type differs from this in the ending of the stories: although the girl does succeed in escaping, the waterhorse comes back for her some time later and carries her off into his loch:

> F58.B.2 *Water horse in Uist*
> Mrs MacKinnon tells of a girl she heard of in Uist; who was at one time hearding near a loch there, and having fallen asleep, when she awoke she found a man lying beside her, who requested her to look his head, at the same time laying it down in her lap, and taking hold of part of her skirt in his mouth. She was afraid to move and began to finger his head, in which she found sand and seaware. At last he fell asleep, and she quietly took a

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to put forward, in so far as, as I mentioned earlier when I was dealing with classification matters, it should never be forgotten that these legends are part of what used to be an orally transmitted tradition. They are not, therefore, likely to present uniform versions of the narratives. Interestingly, these two variants were collected in Oban, and they both include a motif not found elsewhere so far, which is the waterhorse getting hold of the woman's hair, which she then has to cut in order to escape.

> pair of scissors from her pocket, and having clipped the piece of her skirt that was in his mouth right away, she made her escape, and ran home. It was sabbath, and all the men were at church, but there were some of the women standing outside talking, to whom she told about the fright she had got. Just while she was telling them of it, they saw a horse coming down, galloping as hard as it could. In a moment it lifted the girl from among them, and carried her away before their eyes, and she was never seen after that. (Maclagan Mss: 5098-5099)

As we can see, the beginnings in both sub-groups are exactly the same. When reading the start of the stories, it is imposible to tell in advance whether the girl will escape or whether the waterhorse will come back for her. Then the detail of the time is given: this happened on a Sabbath, immediately giving religious connotations to the narrative. It is possible that the variation including mention of the Sabbath is in fact an adaptation of the other form, drawing on religious sanctions that were not always present in the lives of the Highlanders, but did prevail certainly until the end of the nineteenth century – and are in some places still observed [13] – as is expressed in the following extract:

> There was a strong feeling among the people of Lewis against young people courting on Sabbath, and it was believed by many that it was a favourite trick of Satan's to dress himself up like a young man and to try to lead girls into courtship on the Sabbath. Stories used to be told of girls that had been led on to ruin this way. (Maclagan Mss: 5919 – from Mr N. Morrison, a native of Carloway)[14]

In the narrative's terms, the girl is literally ruined, as she is devoured by the waterhorse, and only some of her organs are found floating on the loch. In real terms – those of the tellers and audiences of such stories – this could assume different meanings. The first and most obvious one concerns what could have befallen such a girl who would have succumbed to a young stranger's tricks. Her reputation could be in the balance, which, in close-knit communities like those within which the stories are found, would also involve her family and possibly damage her prospect of marrying. Thus the often quite graphic ending of the legends works well as a warning and the death of the maiden can also be read as the metaphorical social death promised to the real girl who did not conform to the moral codes of her environment.

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[13] See for instance M. Bennett's introduction to her article on contemporary fairy belief (1997 [1991]: 94).

[14] Although in Lewis the religious influence seems to have been greater than in some other parts of the Highlands and Islands, the following analysis will demonstrate, I hope, that this particular view was apparently generally shared in the Hebrides.

The second and more serious consequence would be the conception of an illegitimate child. Such dramatic legends could represent a socially acceptable outlet to deal with these two important issues, as much as a way of teaching younger girls to stay within the boundaries of social and religious norms. As William Bascom defined it, 'folklore fulfils the important but often overlooked function of maintaining conformity to the accepted pattern of behavior.' (1954: 346) 'Accepted' patterns of behaviour would certainly not have included illegitimate pregnancies, and the tragic end of the straying girl in the stories could have been given – and perceived – as more than advice, perhaps a veiled threat: this is what happens to those who disobey.[15] It is perhaps telling that most of the narratives belonging to this sub-group are found in the Hebrides, where the rates for illegitimacy were some of the lowest in Scotland in the nineteenth century (see Flinn 1977: 349-367; table p. 352).[16] Although the period for which statistics are available is relatively late (they start in 1861), compared to the period when the legends would have circulated and been most popular, the explanation for such low rates in the Western Highlands can in all likelihood be applied to previous periods as well, as it is primarily linked to the social mode of organisation present in this part of Scotland.[17] The reasons for the low figures shown in Flinn's survey seem to be related to the courtship system on the one hand, and to the economic repercussions an illegitimate child would have on its mother's parents on the other, as the mother's family would have had to provide for the baby on limited resources. T. C. Smout considers this factor to have been a powerful deterrent, and he places it at the base of the courtship system that existed concurrently, which was very strictly controlled by the parents within the community and, on certain occasions, by other members of the community: 'the girls who went up the hill on the summer shielings to tend the animals and were visited at night by the boys of the township were always accompanied by a few older women who acted as group chaperones.' (1986: 171) We can see from comparing this account to what is depicted in the legends, in which the girl is all alone in the open, that the legends gave a fantasy situation, that would not have occurred, or rather should not have occurred in reality.[18] This illustrates well what Bascom called the 'basic paradox of

[15] In that respect, these legends are akin to the children's narratives that were used to prevent the children from going too near water.

[16] The Far North and Highland Counties show respectively 5.5% and 5.61% (1861) for the illegitimacy ratio, obtained by calculating the proportion of illegitimate births in all births – compare for instance with the rate of 15.12% for the North-east.

[17] The religious divide between Catholics and Protestants does not seem, for its part, to be relevant here.

[18] Smout quotes a 'moral precept' from Barra, which reads like an echo of our legends: 'If you go with anybody to any lonely place or out of the way place the Devil is the third person' (1986: 171).

folklore', which is that: 'while it plays a vital rôle in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions impose upon him.' (1954: 349)

Another element of a cultural institution perhaps reflected in these legends is the tradition of endogamic marriages, which was seen in the clannic system as a means to reinforce bonds between the different branches of a clan. Alliances were formed for instance between the agnatic lineage and families removed from the principal line of descent, yet belonging to the same clan. Alan G. MacPherson noted that this kind of alliance was 'instrumental in protecting the political and economic interests of the clan from internal weakness' (1968: 86), and another author, Rosalind Mitchison, commented how this kind of kinship organisation 'encouraged local cohesiveness' (1978: 14). In other words, the choice of spouse was a very important one in which romantic considerations must seldom have prevailed. Thus the mention that the girl is courted by a 'stranger' takes another dimension, and her tragic ending could be used not only to indicate her deviation from the socially approved courting rules, but also to convey the idea that by consorting with a stranger to her community, she was in effect, and in the eyes of that community, lost to them, possibly permanently.

Taking into account all these aspects of the legends and the values of the real world that they echo, the image of death is perfectly evoked by the personage of the shape-shifting waterhorse and the disappearance of the girl into a loch. These themes play on the archetypal characteristic of water as a passageway to the Otherworld, as well as on the psychopompic role of the horse, which is further reinforced in the case of the *water*-horse.

The next type of narrative that we shall examine is going to take us in a quite different direction, in that the legends possibly express, if not prescription then at least a form of permitted behaviour, rather than prohibitions. However, they still show the all-pervading nature of folklore, especially, as expressed by Bascom, in the transmission of cultural institutions – in our case: marriage – and they also give us a strong sense of the versatility of the use of the waterhorse in legends.

Part 3 – 'And then she realised he was the waterhorse': marriage customs in Scottish legendry

The legends that we are now going to deal with compose the type F57, in which a girl meets a waterhorse in the form of a young man and agrees to marry him. They have a child, but she realises at some point that he is in fact a waterhorse and leaves

him and the child (sometimes children) behind. In two variants from Barra, the waterhorse subsequently tears the children 'asunder' (Appendix 2 – F57.1; F57.2), but in the others, he is heard, sometimes even observed, singing a lullaby to the children thus deserted by their mother.

> F57.3 *Marriage – lullaby*
> There was another story current in Lewis of a water horse that courted a girl in the form of a man, and married her. She found out, too late, what he was, and after the birth of their son, the girl left the horse and the baby, and went back to her parents. The horse seemed to be sorry, and they used to hear him singing a mournful lullaby to the baby, telling it how its mother had gone away, and left it without the means of living. (Maclagan Mss: 9130)

These narratives differ markedly from those we have been discussing until now on several counts. To start with, the element of danger usually present does not feature very strongly here; instead we are confronted with the issue of alterity.[19] Running parallel to the idea of danger is that of death, which, as we have seen so far, is frequently associated with encounters between humans and supernatural creatures; again, this idea is here invalidated. These legends, then, form an exception to the 'rule' of intervention, or rather non-intervention, between the two worlds. Mediatory precautions are never hinted at, yet the woman goes home unharmed – at least physically. She is not entirely the same at the end of the story as she was at the start, however; the girl we first meet gets married and becomes a mother in the short course of the narrative. Change, I think, is what the legends are really about: a change principally linked to marital and familial status, but with the concept of alterity at its centre.

The idea of getting married to a waterhorse may seem curious, in the context of general avoidance, or at least prudence, that we have seen so far in the human dealings with the waterhorse, and especially in respect to the previous category of stories, in which he symbolised evil and was the cause of the downfall of the protagonist. By contrast, I think that his main function in the present narratives is to personify the idea of strangeness, of the other, rather than to illustrate the dangerous aspect of deviation from the norm. That this role was attributed to the waterhorse, as opposed to male fairies for instance, is probably linked as much to his known ability to transform himself into a young man, as it is to his ubiquitous character. Having now a better idea of the range of narratives in which he appears, his presence is less

[19] The notion of alterity does have connotations of danger, in so far as the other symbolises the unknown, and thence the idea of danger. However, these narratives possess a different quality from the stories so far examined.

surprising than the contents of the legends themselves, which are extremely matter-of-factly about the very rapid marriage – even by legend standards – of this alien creature to a human being, and their having offspring. Far from being in contradiction to the legends we examined in the second part of this chapter, it seems to me that these stories complement them. Thus we will be able to see that they give us a wider and more precise picture of what was and was not considered acceptable, especially concerning the nature of marriage – as it is depicted in the legends and in reality – and of its logical consequence, the birth of children. These two aspects will be treated not only in terms of kinship but also in terms of the symbolic significance and implications of marriage.

Different kinds of legal unions existed in Scotland, one of which is perhaps what we have illustrated in the F57 legends, namely the custom of 'handfasting'. Handfasting, or the joining of hands, is attested as a form of marital contract since the early fifteenth century in Scotland.[20] This old form of betrothal allowed a couple to live together for a year, or a year and a day – as is found in one of the legends (Appendix 2 – F57.6).[21] At the end of the period, both parties decided whether they wanted to remain together, and they would then be declared properly married, or whether they preferred to separate. A description of the custom is found in Martin Martin:

> It was an ancient custom in the islands that a man should take a maid to be his wife, and keep her the space of a year without marrying her; and if she pleased him all the while, he married her at the end of the year, and legitimated these children; but if he did not love her, he returned her to her parents, and her portion also; and if there happened to be any children, they were kept by the father: but this unreasonable custom was long ago brought into disuse.[22] (Martin 1994 [1698]: 175)

Such a custom did not require ecclesiastical sanction; in fact the Kirk seems to have been rather opposed to it (see MacPherson 1967: 151). Importantly for our argument, it seems that, as in the case of common-law marriage, 'a verbal agreement to marry in the form of *per verba de praesenti*, even without witnesses, made a valid marriage' (Flinn 1977: 271). Thus, the narrative settings in which the proposal and acceptance of union is depicted as taking place between the two protagonists only, does not appear so strange when placed in context. The link between the stories and

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[20] See the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* for references.

[21] Cf. *Scottish National Dictionary*: '... a frequent condition [associated to handfasting] being that the woman should bear a male child within a year and a day of the contract.'

[22] However, it seems that this kind of temporary union was still practised and considered acceptable in Inverness-shire in the early nineteenth century (MacPherson 1967: 151).

this form of irregular marriage is further indicated by the status of the children who were born as a result of a handfast union. As Martin wrote, they remained with their father, which would make sense in a predominantly patrilineal society such as that of the Highlands.[23] These children were given the same rights as others conceived in wedlock. In his comprehensive study of the parish registers of Laggan (Inverness-shire), MacPherson even remarked that there were different ways to refer to illegitimate children, which accounted for the different 'types' of illegitimacy. At any rate, 'the offspring of handfast marriages were acknowledged by the father, who took full responsibility for them; as in the case of legitimate children, they took the clan of their father.' (1968: 106)

I would like to note, at this point, that the contrast that we perceive between this type and the one previously examined emerges in the legends themselves through the identification of the young man: in the 'Marriage' legends, he is not once mentioned as being a 'stranger', contrary to the 'Head in lap' tales, in which it is part of his description, and a pointer to his deadly motivations. The absence of obvious antagonism in the 'Marriage' legends seems to indicate that their function was linked to another element, perhaps other elements, of the narration. As I mentioned above, the changes undergone through marriage and motherhood could have been the subject of these legends. One variant in particular (Appendix 2 – F57.7) tells how a girl was brought into a cave by a waterhorse, which immediately brings to mind the platonic allegory of the cave as an image of the process of transformation. Indeed, the girl emerges a mother, albeit a childless mother, as she does not take her baby with her.

However, there is another possible dimension to these stories, which comes to light when all the elements mentioned above are assembled in a more cohesive manner. This interpretation takes into account the lullaby that forms the end of some of the variants, in which the father sings to soothe the child when he discovers that the mother has left. All the different versions express a great sadness at Mòr's departure:

> Mor, Mor,
> Mor, Mor,
> Come back to your little son,
> Come back to your little son,
> And you will get a few trout from me to-night.
> The night is cold,

[23] Strictly speaking, the system was a cognatic one (in which a child inherited from both his mother's and his father's sides), but 'Because of a preference for endogamy and patrilocal residence it ... had a strong patrilineal tinge as is evidenced in the inheritance of surnames.' (Fox 1967: 159)

The night is cold
At the hill of Torcan [Sorcan?]
With no fire or comfort
Except for flodain [?]
Beside a hillock and it going out on us.[24]

In a sense, the presence of the lullabies gives us a more profound view of the general tradition in which the legends were found, in that they appeal to our emotional side. Until now, the legends described rather coldly how remains of girls – and children – would be found after the waterhorse had devoured them. In the 'Lullaby' legends, one gets to empathise with at least one of the characters. Thus, the Reverend Norman MacDonald, from whom two versions of the verses were obtained, ended his narration remarking: 'I can still imagine that I'm listening to that handsome old Highland woman telling the story. And as she was finishing the tale, I would say that she felt far more pity for the water-horse, though being who he was, than for Mor once she'd got her freedom.'[25] And indeed, one cannot help but feel for the waterhorse, and for the children deprived of their mother.[26] It seems that the song is there as a kind of personalisation of the legend – in a similar way, perhaps, as the lost song mentioned in Chapter 6, sung to a son by his mother to prevent him from courting a descendant of the waterhorse.

Conclusion

> Folk legends reflect various attitudes to the traumatic problems caused by abandonment, separation and dissolution of marriages. ...[I]t has not been stressed frequently enough that folk legends rather than expressing a single attitude to a particular problem, due to the flexibility and variation which is their very essence, often serve as vehicles for discussion of different solutions to questions of vital interest to tellers and audience. (Almqvist 1990: 63)

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[24] From the Reverend William Matheson (see Appendix 2 – F57.11 for the original Gaelic text). I am extremely grateful to Ms Morag MacLeod for letting me have her transcriptions and translations of recordings made during the 1950s and 1960s.

[25] Appendix 2 – F57.8. The Reverend MacDonald had started the story with this rather contrasting statement: 'Amongst all the unholy creatures in which our forefathers believed, the water-horse was the King of Terrors'.

[26] A similar situation is depicted in Matthew Arnold's poem, 'The Forsaken Merman'; the merman laments over his lost human wife, who has returned to her parents, leaving behind her the merman and their children (Allott [ed.] 1965: 95-100) The motif of the 'forsaken merman' has been attributed the number C713 in Stith Thompson's index (1932-1936), and is linked to B82.1: 'merman marries maiden'.

We have seen, in this chapter and the two previous ones, how flexible and varied waterhorse legends are in Scotland. In the group we have been dealing with in this chapter, there are, moreover, detail that speak of institutions, such as kinship system and marriage, that must indeed have been vital to both tellers and listeners. We have seen how the difference, in real life, between a maiden and a married woman could be shown through the 'Myself' stories and the rest of the legends of the type F58. We have also seen that marriage was treated as an image for a domestic, controlled, conforming existence, in opposition to the wild, untamed aspect associated with the supernatural, itself an apt metaphor for the deviance from the norm, from the accepted modes of behaviour. We can read these legends of the 'Waterhorse as Seducer' as tellings to teach the youth what is expected, and what is reprehensible; what is allowed, and what will be punished – in this world, or in the Otherworld. These two worlds are meshed so intimately, for instance in the 'Lullaby' legends, that the rule we had until now taken for granted – that they should be kept apart – suddenly does not seem so central; there is another, added dimension to these tales, and I proposed that it was the sense of alterity, of alien-ness, associated with the changes occurring at marriage and childbirth. The sense of transgression that comes from the narratives is perhaps even more important to them than has been hinted at. The etymology of transgression is 'going over', 'going beyond' (*OED*) that is to say crossing to the other side. That the word has taken legal and more importantly moral connotations is also well illustrated in our legends, but one should not overlook the aspect of 'going beyond'. Indeed, the imprudent girls caught by the waterhorse have gone beyond both morally – they have disregarded the social rules of their community – and metaphorically – kidnapped by the waterhorse, they are taken under the water of his loch, the otherworldly quality of which is well recognised.

There is thus a very strong sense of liminality in the 'Waterhorse as Seducer' legends, a sense of the marginal coming within the norm, disrupting the accepted order of the world. The stories have been approached mainly from society's point of view, with its institutions and moral and religious codes; we could have looked at them from a different perspective, for instance that of the space in which they occur, and we would have arrived, I believe, at the same conclusions. The issue of the location of the legends has been mentioned in relation to the house and the cooking area that designate the married woman as such and at the same time protect her; and it has also been suggested that the cave from which the maiden emerges a mother could be read as a metaphor for the transformation the girl is going through. By contrast, the lochside often given as the place where the girl encounters the waterhorse, indicates the liminal character of the meeting; it is set in a place in-

between two 'realms', the terrestrial one and the aquatic one, and involves a creature that is neither man nor beast, that can walk on the ground and live underwater. What we are presented with in these stories is perhaps, then, an image both of femininity and of male unchecked sexuality, both dangerous and marginal, until they have been channelled and neutralised, legally and metaphorically, in marriage.[27]

[27] Although I have been interested in developing the symbolic aspect of the heterogeneous group of legends that constitute the 'Waterhorse as Seducer' category, I am aware of the variety of possibilities mentioned by Almqvist above. Thus, while I feel that the 'Myself' narratives, for instance, tell us of the nature of marriage and of the binary cosmological opposition between the domestic and the wild, they undoubtedly also show us a model of a virtuous woman, fending off the attentions of this handsome stranger, a very literal image of refusing to be tempted into an adulterous relationship. Because this first level of analysis is almost instantly reachable, I did not feel the necessity to develop it – which, again does not mean it does not exist.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Often, a 'conclusion' forms in fact the starting-point for further lines of enquiry, a projection into the future of where the diverse strands painstakingly assembled in the course of the study might lead. This, indeed, is such a conclusion and in order to think of the possible directions this projection could take, I will briefly recapitulate what has been presented in this thesis.

Starting with our initial aim, which was to examine different aspects of tradition relating to fresh water in Scotland, we have been led to discuss a fairly wide range of customs and beliefs. Section One discussed first the historical background against which visits to sacred wells developed, before turning to the analysis of the healing practices, and their meaning when taken, as a whole, to form a symbolically very rich ritual. It was proposed that one factor that had led to the progressive yet deep shift in the meaning of the custom was not, contrary to what could have been expected, the repeated attacks of the Church, but, paradoxically, the banalisation of the practice or at least its de-criminalisation. Another factor, however, also slightly paradoxical, is the medicalisation of some of the wells, through the scientific advances that agreed upon the medical virtues of water at certain wells. This phenomenon had already taken place in the Gallo-Roman period, during which there was apparently a real expansion of thermalism. In that respect, Yves Desmet remarked that the consequence of the massive spread of public baths, seems to have been,

> if not the 'desacralisation' of the indigenous springs, at least [the changing, the transformation of] practice and ritual. The partaking of mineral waters became, undoubtedly only partially, but evidently, profane. (1998: 9, n. 11; my translation)[1]

Although in Scotland the opposite seems to have held true – namely that the recognition of physical virtues had in fact rekindled the phenomenon of visiting wells[2] – in view of the modern evolution of the practice, I think that Desmet's point

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[1] '[Tout se passe comme si ... l'implantation massive d'établissements balnéaires avait] sinon "désacralisé", les sources indigènes, tout au moins changé, transformé la pratique et le rituel. La pratique des eaux devint, en partie sans doute, mais sensiblement, profane.'

[2] 'The reverence to wells suggests some allusion to the numerous wells found all over the Highlands, rich in carbonate of iron, which were much resorted to for their tonic virtues, and also the sulphur

applies well to the Scottish context.[3] What is at stake, however, underneath the 'desacralisation' of wells is the closing of a point of contact between two different realities. For wells, and water in general, were imbued with such liminal characteristics that, as we saw in Section Two, they played a major role in establishing zones of interaction between men and the supernatural powers. What we can observe today, in Cicero's terms, is the almost complete disappearance of the *auspicia* while the *sacra* still remain, especially in propitiatory and gratulatory forms. However, the idea of balance, of a certain reciprocity between the human and supernatural worlds seems to have all but disappeared, as is indicated – to take one instance among many – by the shift in the priorities expressed through a question to an oracle.[4] The removal of the 'death' component in health-related divinatory questions makes sense, however, in this context. Indeed, by severing, to all intents and purposes, the connection with the supernatural, man also loses the connection with the Otherworld, and hence with death. How could a substance which has lost its association with the dead know about death? It cannot.

It has, however, been endowed with a different kind of association. It would be interesting to know if the grandchildren who went to Craiguck Well with their grandmother are still visiting the well in twenty years time, and if they do, why and what they expect from it, for the new important factor in modern visits to wells is, I think, relevance; not necessarily the relevance of the practice, but of the place itself, its relation to the people who come to visit it. Katarzina Marciniak brought up the point very clearly when she related the perception of certain Polish places as being sacred, not so much because of the magico-religious affinities of such places but because they still hold a cultural significance for the people who visit them:

> [T]hose places in contemporary Poland that are perceived as sacred, although they may have some historical and political significance, are most important to contemporary believers because of their religious and magical functions. In contrast, prehistoric sites do not have any contemporary function. They may be perceived as having had sacred significance in the past but because people of today have no direct cultural identification with pre-historic groups, these ancient sacred places are perceived almost exclusively as monuments of the past. (1994: 151)

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water in great repute for skin diseases, scrofula, and rheumatism. One of this latter has been for a long time famous as a health resort, and the Strathpeffer spring is now known as Strathpeffer Spa.' (MacPhail, R. S. 1896: 272)

[3] To be exact, it applied until recently, perhaps until the last thirty or forty years. Since then, a certain revival in the perception of wells as preternatural places seems to have occurred, probably triggered by the increase of interest in spirituality and holistic healing methods.

[4] The question concerned the rapidity of the recovery of the patient, not his or her chances of recovery.

Thus one could argue that the tinge of nationalism that is associated with visits to St Mary's Well in Culloden Wood is probably partly what will help to 'keep the custom of our fathers' alive, because it relates a place of the past to people living in the present. It also creates a sort of community, or perhaps more precisely, it creates a *centre* to which people can attach themselves – it becomes an anchor, metaphorically and emotionally related to the ground, and hence to the 'nation'. The image of the anchor is also quite apt to describe the more personal attachment to a particular place, as we saw in the case of Craiguck Well and the inhabitants of Avoch. In both cases, we are dealing wih questions of identity and the sense of belonging.

If wells are still considered as centres, as has just been proposed, are they also still associated with margins? They certainly seem to have shed along the years their boundary associations. They do not appear so liminal any more, perhaps, to keep the nautical image, because being anchored has given them a permanence which goes against the essentially transitory nature of the boundary, which raises a question as to whether the conception of time has similarly been affected.

We discussed, also in Section Two, the remarkable importance of time, that is certain kinds of time, at certain points of the day, or the year. Their importance was reflected in the coherence of the system as a whole, but also in the role festivals played in community life, by establishing certain mechanisms of social control for instance, as the May Day practices seemed to show. The correspondence between the symbolic sphere and daily social and cultural organisation indicated that both systems were well integrated. The festivals were religious symbols in Clifford Geertz's acceptation of the expression, able as they were to 'formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other.' (1966: 4) The dependence of festivals on the mode of organisation that created them seems to have been their – relative – downfall. They as well, are being 're-invented' in order, appropriately enough, to reconcile them with modern society.

The inter-dependence of the milieu and its productions, notably its cultural manifestation, was in essence what was presented in Section Three of the thesis. That the waterhorse narratives were telling of a vanishing/vanished world is very well expressed in the sad comment made in the following extract:

> At that time there were a lot of people living up there, but since it has been put under deer, there are no people, and there are no words of anything of that kind being seen there now. (Maclagan Mss: 7909)[5]

If there is no one to see the waterhorses, who is going to tell about them? In a way, this reflection was as much about the disappearance of people and of certain ways of life as it was about the waterhorse.

Each of the types of the waterhorse narratives examined in the thesis could have been made the subject of a separate, extensive treatment, especially in their relation to the social environment in which they were told and known – this could perhaps constitute the focus of a future study.[6] At any rate, I hope that the foundations can be considered safely laid, notably with respect to the new taxonomy proposed.

There seems to be a definite pattern to the modes of interaction between supernatural and human worlds, even though they tend not to be the same for men and for women. For instance, the workhorse stories have been shown to illustrate the point that the waterhorse could be used as a normal horse, provided an intermediary was used when dealing with it. In the case of women, however, if the legends are lessons in kinship and propriety, they are also statements about the symbolic nature and connotations of both women and waterhorses. This showed through notably in the use and division of the landscape. Liminal places such as water and the banks of a loch, associated with un-institutionalised sexuality, and therefore danger, were balanced by the association of the home with marriage, and safety. In Juliette Wood's words, 'Landscape is not only a setting, but it also acts as an indicator of what is happening. As a result, there is a correlation between action and environment.' (Wood 1984: 529)

Yet, in the Scottish customs and beliefs under discussion here, the 'correlation' alluded to by Wood extends well beyond the immediately perceptible relationship between landscape and the action taking place in it. At a symbolic level, the association of such components as water, horse and special moments in time serves to emphasise and qualify the belief in the existence of an Otherworld, only accessible by humans under very restricted circumstances. The liminal periods of the day or the year provide the temporal settings against which the communication between the two worlds takes place, through the medium of water and the presence of horses. As the circling of a sacred well 'opens' the passage to let the healing powers come through, similarly one could say that the circling of a well, or of a village, during the ritual

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[5] From J. Macdonald, Culramlaich, Sutherland; see Appendix 2 – F4.A.29.

[6] I am aware that the 'oral' component of the 'oral narratives' under study in this thesis has not been developed, but it was outside the purpose of this work, which was, in respect to the waterhorse legends, to build a 'thick corpus' that could be used especially in comparative studies.

horse-races held around New Year and harvest time open the gates to the Otherworld. Once this is done, the horse and its rider are able to go there, taking with them an offering of food or the horse's blood, and then to come back, bringing back with them the blessings and protection afforded by the supernatural forces thus visited. The horse in this context is therefore more than a messenger, since it represents the possibility of entering into contact with the Otherworld. This certainly appears to be the case in the waterhorse narratives.

By bringing together such diverse customs and narratives as have been presented in this study, I set out to give a representative idea of some of the Scottish traditions and beliefs associated with fresh water. Some of these are obvious and well-known, such as the visits paid to St Boniface's Well where rags and their modern equivalents hang on trees directly off the main road. Some have on the contrary disappeared, leaving behind them traces becoming more and more confused with time, partly because of the inevitable loss of information increasing as the custom recedes further back to the *illo tempore* of the mythical past, and partly because the context that made sense of them, and in which they made sense, may not resonate any more with different ways of life. The ritual horse races that we discussed in relation to harvest and New Year temporal frames definitely illustrate the latter. The study of these races, however, together with the study of the adjacent customs oriented towards the making or gathering of certain foodstuffs, or towards guising practices and folk rhymes acting as magic charms, is pivotal to ethnological and anthropological research, for not only could it serve perhaps to explain modern occurrences or resurgences that seem otherwise not to make sense, but it may also take us closer to an original system of beliefs and thinking. Because there are not, in Scotland, early mythical writings such as exist for Ireland, Wales or Iceland to name but close, European, instances, the study of customs and the related beliefs essentially pertaining to cosmology is of fundamental importance. I hope, with this study, to have made a contribution, however tentative, towards this aim.

APPENDIX 1

EXTRACTS FROM THE PRESBYTERY BOOK OF TURRIFF

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EXTRACTS FROM THE *PRESBYTERY BOOK OF TURRIFF 1642-1688*

The extracts presented in this Appendix represent all the entries in the *Presbytery Book* (National Archives of Scotland: CH2/1120/1) relating to the Well of Seggatt. Although a glossary has been provided for certain terms, the spelling has not been edited.

31 August 1643. *Superstitious well*:
Inquire to the takin of those who goe to superstitious wells and the deliquentes herein to be punished.

12 October 1643. *Superstitious well*:
Ordained that inquiris be made who has gone to y^{t} superstitious well that the parochiners of Drumblate called our Lady's well and they be sumonded to the next day.

22 November 1649. *Well of Sigget*:
That a carne of stones be put upon the well of Sigget.

20 December 1649. *Well of Sigget*:
The well of Sigget to be filled up.

10 January 1650. *Well of Sigget*:
Mr Andrew Massie reported that he has agreed with servantes to put ane cairne upon the well of Sigget.

31 January 1650. *Well of Sigget*:
Mr Andrew Massie ordained to cause put a cairne of stones upon the well of Sigget how(ever) sone [soon] the frost ... [*thaws*] that stones may be raised from the ground.
[to cause + vb infin e.g. do = to have something done]

28 February 1650. *Well of Sigget*:
It is found that the well of Sigget is filled up.

21 March 1650. *Well of Sigget*:
Mr Andrew Massie signaled that the well of Sigget once filled up was emptied on the night be some evill affected personis, he is ordained (if he can get any tryall who thie were) to sumond them to the presbytery and once again to fill the said well and put a greatter carne of stones upon the same.

4 April 1650. *Well of Sigget*:
It is found that the well of Sigget is filled up again and a greater cairn of stones putt upon it.

25 November 1652. *Sigget*:
The Presbiterie recommands to Mr Andrew Massie to cover the well of Sigget with stones and to use diligence for trying who frequent the same for superstitious worship.

16 December 1652. *Sigget*:
Concerning the wol of Sigget Mr Andrew Massie does declare that there can be nothing done in that business for the present because of the unconstancie of the weather and the shortness of the day but he promises to use diligence thereanent whensoever the day becomes longer and the weather more constant.

27 January 1653. *Sigget*:
The well of Sigget as of supra.

18 February 1653. *Sigget*:
The woll of Sigget is not yet covered. The Presbyterie renewis the former ordinance.

10 March 1653. *Sigget*:
The well of Sigget is not covered. Mr Andrew Massie is exhorted to be myndfull of his promise.

31 March 1653. *Sigget*:
Concerning the wol of Sigget, Mr Andrew Massie does declare that he has dealt with the orders thereanent but can not get them moved to waire anie more paines in it, but notwithstanding he promises for himself that if no man will take paines on it he shall yock servants to it on his charges and that his diligence shall be seene by the brethren as they go along to the assemblie.

4 May 1653. *Sigget*:
Mr Andrew Massie has used diligence anent the well of Sigget: and, as he reported, has done all that can be done for the tyme. Onlie it is recommended to him: that he will search and take notice wha does frequent that place for superstitious worship.

APPENDIX 2

CORPUS OF WATERHORSE TALES

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CORPUS OF WATERHORSE TALES

This corpus follows the classification system presented in Chapter 6. The amendments to the original catalogue, as devised by Alan Bruford and Donald Archie MacDonald, have been indicated by an asterisk placed before the altered word or title.

There has been no editorial intervention on the text of the narratives, but titles have been provided where they were lacking, mainly to be able to refer to some of them by their title in the thesis, and partly to present an homogeneous arrangement.

Unfortunately, I was sometimes unable to provide the full version of a story, which I have indicated by placing '[Summary]' at the start of the narrative.

F1 – F50: Encounters; Habitat

*F4. Knowledge/Sighting of the Waterhorse
A – Waterhorse known to be attached to particular location
B – Sighting of the waterhorse
C – Anecdotes and general statements

F18. *Supernatural beings haunt mill
B1 – Waterhorse
B2 – Njuggle

F48. Supernatural Taken for Cripple. Helped until Discovered to Have:
B – Webbed Feet

F51 – F100: Abduction; Thefts

F56. Other Tales of *Supernatural Suitor Foiled or Driven Away (cf. ML 6000 – Tricking the Fairy Suitor)
A – Water Horse

F57. *Waterhorse as Young Man Seduces Girl; they Marry and Have Children; she Escapes (he Sings a Lullaby) (MLST 4088)

F58. *Waterhorse as Young Man Meets Girl; Rests his Head on her Lap/Asks her to Comb his Hair; she Realises what he is and Runs away (MLST 4088)
A – She is safe
B – He comes back for her and carries her off into loch
C – Bull is let loose to fight the waterhorse

F68. Children Carried off by the Waterhorse (MLST 4087)
*A – All drown
*B – One escapes: B1) by cutting off finger/hand
B2) thanks to Christian protection
B3) other

*F77. Woman Carried off by the Waterhorse

F94. *Waterhorse as Workhorse (ML 4086)
A – Taken for a ride: A1) rider carried off into loch
A2) rider manages to escape
B – Caught with bridle and made to work: B1) dragging stones
B2) ploughing
C – Caught by removing bridle
D – Left alone

F101 – F130: Wishes; Help; Gifts

F112. Wish for Female Company
*A – MacPhee's Black Dog
*B – Horse-fairy (Kelpie)

F131 – F150: Attacks; Escapes

*F135. Waterhorse Attacks:
A – Girls in shieling
B – Men; waterhorse is subdued or killed

F138. The Hour Has Come but not the Man (cf. ML 4050: River Claiming Its Due)
A – Waterhorse waiting in river/at ford

*F139. Waterhorse Tries to Drown Human in River
A – Human escapes
B – Human drowns

F143. *Mi fhéin* (cf. AT 1137)

F150. Dog Drives away Supernatural
A – Never returns
B - Other

Miscellaneous

*F4. Knowledge/Sighting of the Waterhorse

A – WATERHORSE KNOWN TO BE ATTACHED TO PARTICULAR LOCATION

F4.A.1 *Loch Abhaidh*

It is believed in Coll that an each-uisge inhabits Loch Abhaidh in that island; and it is told that it has often been seen by people when going in the direction of the loch for peats.

Maclagan Mss: 1800.

F4.A.2 *Slochd Gorm*

There is a deep pond between the farms of Lossit and Kelsa, in the Rhinns of Islay which bears the name of Slochd Gorm. It used to be said that an Each Uisge lived in it.

Maclagan Mss: 1802.

F4.A.3 *Loch Frisa*

A. McD[ougald] tells how that when he himself was a boy, it was quite a common belief in the place that there was an Each uisge in the loch [Loch Frisa, Mull], not far from his father's house, and he used to be very much afraid when he had occasion to go in the direction of the loch. The belief was that the Each uisge lived in the loch, but occasionally disported itself on dry land.

Maclagan Mss: 1802-1803.

F4.A.4 *Loch-nan-Each*

It is said that there is an Ulaidh [treasure] hid in Loch-nan-Each, in the Lergy side of Kintyre, which is guarded by the Each uisge that inhabits the loch, and it is said that any person who will drain the loch, will get the ulaidh.

Maclagan Mss: 1803.

F4.A.5 *Skye*

There is a small fresh water loch in the parish of Sleat, in Skye, in which it is believed in the district, an Each uisge lives. The people are afraid of it, and warn strangers who come the way, not to go near the lake.

Maclagan Mss: 1804.

F4.A.6 *Islay*

It is said there used to be an Each Uisge at Port-an-Eilan, in Trilagom, Islay.

Maclagan Mss: 1804-1805.

F4.A.7 *Knockbane*

They were also saying that there was a water horse in a little loch in the parish of Knockbane, but I never heard of any harm done by it.

Maclagan Mss: 8055.

F4.A.8 *Sutherlandshire*

Referring to belief in the water horse, the reciter, who is a native of the parish of Dornoch, said he often heard of it in connection with several fresh water lochs in Sutherlandshire, and people used to say that it could come out of the water at times, and would be seen on land just like an ordinary horse. It was also said that if one put his hand on it, the hand would stick to its skin, and the person would not relieve himself, and so the horse would drag him into the loch. Many a one, I heard people saying, was drowned in that way.

On the divided state of opinion as to whether there is really such a thing as a water horse in existence, he said that few people seem now to believe in it, but for his own part, he is rather inclined to think it may be, for he often heard old people saying that there is a creature in the water corresponding to every kind of creature that can be found on land.

Maclagan Mss: 8792 (from Ebenezer Munro, Embo, Dornoch).

F4.A.9 *Scaniport*

There is a pool in the burn beside Scaniport, in which it used to be said there was a water horse. According to reports that were current, it was often seen on the adjoining lands, and it was said, and believed, that if any person put his hand on its bridle, the hand would stick to the bridle so firmly that he could not relieve himself. In this way several persons were said to have been captured, and carried into the pool, and were never again heard of, or seen, either alive or dead. The reciter says that he remembers when he was young, it was a great terror to people all round about the place, and if one had occasion to go near the pool, he would walk with the greatest precaution, keeping his eyes open in every direction, in case he should be pounced upon by the brute.

Maclagan Mss: 8854 (from Lachlan McBean, Scaniport, Inverness).

F4.A.10 *Loch Dhool*

There are stories of both a water horse and a water cow being seen on Loch Dhool, and of the horse Mairi Ruadh said that a brother of hers was one time employed on the Dingwall and Skye railway, and came down to Lochcarron to attend the funeral of a friend. Having to walk all the way, and because he wished to be down early in the day, he left early the night before, and was alone. When he reached Loch Dhool, he heard a terrible plunging and splashing in the loch which continued for a while, but he saw nothing. That would be very early in the morning, perhaps between two and three o'clock. He believed it was the water horse, and so did other people to whom he told about it.

Maclagan Mss: 9131.

F4.A.11 *Kelpie in the Dee*

Now, before leaving the vicinity of the kirkyard, let us take a look at the picturesque pool in the Dee a little west of the church, because it is probably the last place on Lower Deeside where a genuine water-kelpie made its appearance. Some 'hundred years ago and more' a salmon fisher was rowing his coble across the pool and paying out his net as he went. It was in the gloaming, with a thick 'haar' on the water; and as he turned his boat he glanced over his shoulder and saw the water kelpie on a rock, with a large chain ready to throw at him. Pulling harder than he ever had done in all his days, the terrified oarsman got to his 'home' side and breathlessly

told his companions what had happened. The mist prevented them seeing anything; but plain to their ears was the sound of the chain 'gaun clickin' doon the garth'; a garth, as I trust you know, being a stretch of shingle. And the kelpie was (alas!) never again seen in Banchory-Devenick.

Buchan (ed.) 1994: 272.

F4.A.12 *Loch Larig*

A Lochaber man said:

I have often heard of water horses, and of water bulls too, but I don't know whether there are such creatures in it or no. I know many believe in them, and this is what I saw myself once. I went with a man to fish on a little loch called Loch Larig. It is on the monadh liath – and when we reached it, pretty early in the morning – a beautiful summer morning it was – we found it fearfully disturbed, and the water all dirty. We could not make out what was the cause, for we saw nothing, but my own idea was that it must have been the water horse, if there is such a thing.

Maclagan Mss: 8744 (from Donald Campbell, Gairlochy).

F4.A.13 *Port-an-eilein and Boireachuill lochs*

[D. Duffie from Portcharlotte, Islay] says that Port-an-Eilein and Boireachuill lochs, in Islay, used to be frequented by water horses, and people used to be afraid of them.

Maclagan Mss: 2423.

F4.A.14 *Finlagan Loch in Islay*

A native of Islay says that he has often heard of an each uisge which haunted Finlagan loch in Islay. He also refers to the story of siol nan each uisge.

Maclagan Mss, p. 3355 (from Duncan Duffie, Portcharlotte, Islay).

F4.A.15 *Loch-Inch-na-ba-buidhe*

Loch-Inch-na-ba-buidhe on the West coast of Sutherlandshire was believed by the natives to be inhabited by an each uisge.

Maclagan Mss: 3355 (from Duncan Duffie, Portcharlotte, Islay).

F4.A.16 *Water horse in Gleann dubh*

There is a legend which is current in Morven to the effect that Gleann dubh there was at one time a large loch in which there was a large water horse that kept the people in the neighbourhood in constant terror. It used to come out the loch at times and make fearful raids on land, carrying all before it. One night it left the loch with a fearful noise,and rushed along, passing houses, and across fields at an awful rate. The course it took is still pointed out, and whatever was the cause of it, nobody ever knew, but from that night it has never been seen nor heard in Morven.

Maclagan Mss: 3784 (from Mr Macdiarmid, Morven).

F4.A.17 *Eich uisge in Uist and Barra*

A native of Barra says that eich uisge were believed to have been very numerous in Uist, and he accounts for them being so plentiful there by the fact that there are such a large number of lochs. The inhabitants of Uist were so much afraid of them, he says, that they were afraid to go out at night.

There used to be one in a loch on the top of a hill in Barra.
Maclagan Mss: 5099.

F4.A.18 *Uisge-an-talamh-dubh*

There is a small stream near Ardlarach called Uisge-an-talamh-dubh, in which, according to local tradition an each uisge lived in olden times. The traditions say that this each uisge was very mischievious, and a great terror to people. It was said that nobody could pass that place after sunset and still live, unless he was under the protection of a charm.

Maclagan Mss: 3359 (from Miss Mactavish, Springbank, Islay).

F4.A.19 *Water horse on Laggan Strand*

There used to be water horses going backward and forward, from loch to loch through the island. There was one that used to be constantly on Laggan Strand, and no body for his very heart dared go along the strand after night fall without a silver handled whip, but if he had a silver handled whip in his hand, the horse could not touch him.

Maclagan Mss: 5788 (from Malcolm McEachern, Port-Ellen, Islay).

F4.A.20 *Kelpies of Arran*

The reciter says that the water horse was known in Arran, but went generally under the name of kelpie. Stories relating to them were very common in his young days, with many of which he says he was familiar at one time, but they have almost all gone from his memory. He remembers there was one famous kelpie about which there were a lot of stories. It was said it used to be seen leaping from hill to hill, and sometimes changed itself into the form of a man, and sometimes also into that of a woman. It was believed to be full of mischief, and people were afraid of it.

Another native of Arran said: Many a story I have heard of how the kelpies would often come on the smugglers when they would be up among the hills making whisky. They would often sit beside them for a whole night, and would sometimes even help them.

Maclagan Mss: 6795 (from Mr A. MacMillan, Whiting Bay, Arran).

F4.A.21 *Loch bogie*

Lochbogie, in the parish of Ferintosh, is said to have been haunted by a water horse, and people believed that they saw it at times coming up from the loch on the adjoining land, but there is no record of any mischief having been done by it.

Maclagan Mss: 7169 (from Donald Bisset, Mulbuie, Chanonry).

F4.A.22 *Loch Garten*

The reciter says she many a time heard of a water horse that used to be seen in Lochgarten, and she has known many people who fully believed that there was such a thing.

Maclagan Mss: 7171 (from Miss Cameron, Deshar, Duthil, Invernessshire).

F4.A.23 *Note on the water horse of Loch Garten*

Besides these, there are several others in the district who refer to the water horse as having been seen, and from all of them it appears that belief in its existence is very

common in the locality. It is said the most sceptical even never go beyond expressing a somewhat mild doubt. But unlike what one finds in so many other parts of the Highlands where the idea of the water horse if familiar to the people, the Lochgarten water horse does not appear to have been ever reported as indulging in mischievious pranks, such as are so commonly met with in the water horse tales of other parts.

Maclagan Mss: 7171-7172.

F4.A.24 *Loch Eileadar, Luing*

A native of the island of Luing says that it used to be commonly reported and believed that there was a water horse in Loch Eileadar, near the village of Toberonachy, and several who passed the loch at night declared that they had seen it ashore. But it was said that it would never be seen far from the loch, and as soon as it felt any person coming near, it would make a rush for the water.

Maclagan Mss: 7680 (from Mrs Macdougall, Luing).

F4.A.25 *Lochlochan*

A Cowan man says that there used to be stories of a water horse that was seen in Lochlochan between Dunoon and Sandbank. And an Inveraray man says that he remembers quite well in his young days, when there were a very general belief among people about Inveraray, that there were both water horses and water bulls. A Fort William man who was present rejoined that they need not doubt it now either. 'I tell you there are water horses, and water bulls too'.

Maclagan Mss: 7680.

F4.A.26 *Lochawe*

An old man who is a native of Port Appin, speaking of the water horse said that he had heard of a water horse being seen in Lochawe, but never heard of its having done any mischief.

Maclagan Mss: 7686 (from John Black, Port Appin).

F4.A.27 *Beallachuilish and Lismore*

Another Appin man said that he had heard of water horses but never heard of them being in the parish of Appin. He heard of one being in Beallachuilish and another in a little loch that is in the centre of the island of Lismore.

Maclagan Mss: 7686.

F4.A.28 *Benderloch*

The reciter said that when she was serving in Duror she heard people speaking of a water horse that was seen on some loch up there abouts, and she also heard of one being in Benderloch, but she never heard of any harm being done by any of them. She confessed that she had not given much heed to what people said; for she thought it could hardly be true, although it might be, for, said she, 'There is many a strange thing in it'.

Maclagan Mss: 7686 (from Miss Macintyre, Wood Hall, Appin).

F4.A.29 *Loch Laroch and Loch Cragaig*

A native of the parish of Creich in Sutherlandshire, said:

My father was a shepherd for a long time up on the hills near Loch Laroch, and I often heard him telling how people used to say that they would be seeing water horses in Loch Cragaig. There were two lochs beside each other of that name, and they said there were water horses in both; and in Loch Laroch too, which is not far from Loch Cragaig.

My father said that all the time he had been there, he could not say that he had seen anything unnatural, but one time he had been from home, and was coming home at night, and when he was going along the side of Loch Laroch, he heard two or three splashes, like a horse plunging into the water. He saw nothing, but believed that the splashing he heard were caused by the water horse.

At that time there were a lot of people living up there, but since it has been put under deer, there are no people, and there are no words of anything of that kind being seen there now.

Maclagan Mss: 7909 (from J. Macdonald, Culramlaich, Sutherland).

F4.A.30 *Loch Kearsinish*

John Bàn Currie, brother of John Roy Currie now living at South Lochboisdale and the oldest man in the South East, when a boy came home telling his father that he had been pelting a great seal in Loch Kearsinish with stones but that he could not hit him. The loch was a fresh water one and too far away for any seal to approach it. His father who knew the state of matters better understood that his son had been pelting the water horse of the lake, which was seen by very many people.

CW 58A, f. 354 (Father Allan MacDonald, Eriskay).

F4.A.31 *Water horse of Loch Kearsinish*

Widow Malcolm Morrison of South Boisdale told me on 18th Oct. 1859 that when she was a little girl she used to herd a couple of sheep, and have them milked. She used an ioniaidecle a small cogie covered with sheepskin. She left them on the hill to follow some people who were driving away horses for one McM... who was taking horses – for fares of people from Caola, Eriskay, who were going to America. When looking for the cogies afterwards, she saw the water horse distinctly in the 'rathagach' in Loch Kearsinish. He was as large as any horse she ever saw. [missing] was black. [Gaelic sentence]. [missing] curled over his back like the rim of a wheel [spinning] and his eyes were flashing with fire.

CW 58A, f. 358 (Father Allan MacDonald, Eriskay).

F4.A.32 *Lochgair*

A Lochfyne man said:

I often heard of water horses. There is a loch in the hill above Lochgair, and people used to say there was one in that loch.

Maclagan Mss: 8962 (from J. Sinclair, Furnace, Lochfyne).

F4.A.33 *Loch Phadair*

CM: And the old people were saying that the water-horse was up in Loch Phadair.

BM: Yes, that was so right enough.

CM: And they'd be telling stories, many times that it would happen across little girls and so forth, in the shape of a man.

BM: There you have it. Always in search of young girls, the water-horse.

CM: Right.

BM: And if a poor girl were to ... the water-horse would be up to that sort of thing. But we don't believe much of those things.

SA1953.123.B7 (from Bella McNeil, Colonsay; interviewed by C. I. MacLean).

F4.A.34 *Kirsty Cameron and the Loch Ness water horse*

D: I see. And they'd be talking about the beast on Loch Ness?

R: Oh, Loch Ness Monster. Well, I was looking after an old woman who used to work by Loch an Niamh. She went blind and she had a place up here and they sent me to mind her. Well, she was a hundred years old if she were a day, and she was there and no one knew just how old she was, Kirsty Cameron. She was saying that when she was a little girl, that they would talk about the water-horse there in Loch Ness. That's out of a hundred years. I think she was a hundred when she died.

D: And where was she staying? Near here?

R: Yes. She was working on Loch an Niamh. She was around there for I believe fifty years.

D: And where was she born?

R: In Beauly.

D: Oh, Beauly ... Did she speak much Gaelic?

R: Och, not much, pet.

SA1969.179.B7 (from Rebecca Stewart, Lochaber; recorded by J. MacInnes).

F4.A.35 *Loch Ness*

People used to say there was a water horse in loch Ness, but I don't know. I never knew a man who could say for certain that he had seen it. But there was a man, P. R., who lived west from the village of Dores. He was a kind of game keeper, and I heard him telling of a time he was up on the brae, face above the loch, and he saw some kind of large beast rising out of the water, and again plunging back out of sight. He said he could not tell what it was, for it was a good distance from him, but the water was lashed into foam all round about where it had made the plunge. He thought no steamer could have made more foam. Some were thinking it might have been the water horse.

Maclagan Mss: 8854 (from Mr Smith, Dochcarroch, Inverness).

F4.A.36 *Water horse in Coire à lèith*

The reciter said:

A sister of my grandmother's lived in Slumbaigh, Lochcarron, and I often heard them telling about one time she was away at the shealling. She had the servant girl along with her, and they had six cows. The shealling was beside a fresh water loch that is in the hill between Lochcarron and Kishorn. The name of this loch is Coire à lèith, and it was always said that people would be seeing unnatural things in that loch, and they were saying there was a water horse in it. Well, one evening, when my grandmother's sister and the girl were there, the bull that was with the cows commenced booving at a terrible rate. At first it was a good distance away, but it was coming nearer to the hut in which they were; and at last my grandmother's sister cried to the girl to run for her life, and they both threw from them everything they had, and leaving all behind them, they made for home as fast as they could run. They had a long distance to go, and by the time they reached home it was late, and they

were all in bed. When they told the story of what had sent them home, the son got up and said 'it's time that I were not here'. And he was going right away to the shealling, to see what was wrong, and to look after the cattle, but his mother pleaded with him not to go till after the cock would crow (Och cha'n eirich, is cha teid thu 'mach air an dorus gus an goir an Coileach). People say that if there is any unnatured creature, it cannot do one any harm after the cock has crowed. The son however was impatient to be away, but his mother would not allow him to stir. But at any rate she had not long to keep him till the cock crew; and then he went off, and when he reached the shealling, he found the hut torn to pieces, and the bull could hardly rise to its feet, it was so worn out, after having been fighting with whatever creature had come out of the loch. They were sure it must have been the water horse.

Maclagan Mss: 9052-9053.

F4.A.37 *Special breed of horses*

Reference having been made to belief in the existence of water horses, Mr P., who has lived a good deal in the Highlands, and has been in touch with the people a good deal, said that he has heard ever so many strange stories about water horses. He said:

Loch Treig is said to be a great place for water horses. There is a farmer at the end of it who has a very special breed of horses, and people say they were got from the water horse.

Maclagan Mss: 8744 (from Mr Paton, Tulloch, Invernessshire).

F4.A.38 *Sloc an Eich Dhuibh*

[Summary] Pool in river in Glenlyon, known as Sloc an Eich Dhuibh. Informant doesn't know if the name refers to a water horse.

SA1964.71.A2 (from Ella Walker, Breadalbane, Glenlochay; recorded by A. Ross).

F4.A.39 *Kelpie in Loch an Fhidhealadair*

– Did you ever hear any stories about the each-uisge?

– Yes. There was an each-uisge in Loch an Fhidealadair, from which our council was threatening to use water, and we refused to have it! We told the engineer – (laugh) that's laterer, later. That happened just about a month ago, there's some of the councillors, see, but we refused to have anything to do with it, but the engineer told us 'It's guaranted to be fit for human consumption'. And we said: 'Well can you guaranty --- because the each-uisge might be lying for him at the bottom of the loch (laughs).

– The story is about the each-uisge being in the water...

– Oh yes! Oh yes! There are stories all along about the each-uisge. And, er, on an evening with sunshine and rain, the fairies used to dance around Loch an Fhidealadair. And they had a great time dancing and singing, and carrying on about Loch an Fhidealadair. So we natives don't want to drink any of the water that comes from Loch an Fhidealadair, because we have beautiful spring water, that any one can drink, and that's been drunk for years! And we don't want Loch an Fhidealadair. And we put it before the council. And we think they've abandoned the scheme, because it seems forgotten a bit now (laughs).

SA1953.113.A8 (from Peter MacIntyre, Luing; recorded by C. MacLean).

F4.A.40 *Loch Morar*

[Summary] The informant talks of *a' Mhòrag*, an each uisge in Loch Morar. He does not believe in it, and says it is the same as hippopotamus. He says that he heard a story once about the each-uisge. It came onto land, met a girl, looked at the girl's head, then absconded with girl.

SA1954.39.07 (from Donald MacEachan, Arisaig; recorded by C. I. MacLean)

F4.A.41 *Kelpie in Balnald Burn*

[Summary] The informant says that his mother said there was a kelpie in Allthodar burn, also known as Balnald Burn. His mother said that all you had to do was go out and listen on a night when it was threatening rain and you would hear the sigh of the burn – the mowing of the kelpie.

SA1965.20.B7 (from Duncan MacGregor, Killin, Perthshire; wrong ref. number).

F4.A.42 *Water horse in Loch Laggan*

Note: Loch Laggan, also on this property boasts of a water horse. And at night, a bright light is seen to swim up and down the lake. Then they say 'the water horse moves'.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff. 34a-34b (from W. M., sheriff's officer).

F4.A.43 *Each uisge*

[Summary] The informant was afraid to go fishing at Lochan a' Lairig Ilidh as a boy because of stories about water horses. Ilidh - water spirit worshipped by pagans. He says there were stories of children going on back of black stallion which disappeared into the loch with them.

SA1964.28.B21 (from Allan Walker, Killin; recorded by A. Ross).

F4.B SIGHTING OF THE WATERHORSE

F4.B.1 *Loch Dubh*

There is a loch near Poolewe, called Loch-Dubh, in which it was commonly believed a water horse had its quarters. The loch is not large, but it is very deep. A. G. tells how that on one occasion, when an Aunt of his, with her husband, were on their way to a prayer meeting, on a Friday evening; and when they had reached the side of this loch, they saw a large creature rise out of the water, and plunge down again, with such force that the whole loch seemed to have been disturbed. It was the same shape as an ordinary horse, but its mane was much more bushy. They had no doubt but it was the water horse, which was believed to live in the loch. They reported the affair among their neighbours, and again it was reported to the factor of the Estate at the time, who was an Englishman. The factor took steps to have the loch drained, but after working at it for a while, failed for want of fall for the water, the loch being so deep. The people were so much afraid of the horse, that nobody would venture on the loch with a boat.

Maclagan Mss: 1803-1804.

F4.B.2 *Loch Ness*

I lodged with a man of the name of McK... beside Loch Ness. He was a strong believer in water horses, and assured me that he knew a man there, who was going

along the road by the side of loch Ness on one occasion, and saw the water horse coming to the surface. He said it raised its head high out of the water, and then made a great plunge, and went out of sight. People say of these horses that they have great capacities running and enduring fatigue.

Maclagan Mss: 8744 (from Mr Paton, Tulloch, Invernessshire).

F4.B.3 *Water horse in Ardrishaig*

An Ardrishaig woman says that it used to be said that there were both water horses and water bulls in some of the little lochs up at Ford. She related a story she used to hear of a farmer who got a fright with a water horse once. This farmer, according to the story, was living beside one of these lochs, and was in the habit of rising very early, and going out to look after his cattle. One morning, when he went out as usual, he saw a water horse ashore among his young horses, and he got such a fright that he never after that day went out in the early morning to look after his cattle.

Maclagan Mss: 7680 (from Miss Smith, Ardrishaig).

F4.B.4 *Coire à lèith – Lochcarron*

Nighean a chlachar saw a boat one time in full sail on Coire à lèith loch, and at that time there was no boat of any description on that loch. People thought at the time it must have been the water horse in the form of a boat, for it was well known that strange things had been seen there by some. But the shooting tenant has this year put a small boat on the loch, and now people think it may have been the shadow of this boat that Nighean a Chlachar saw. But whether it was that or the water horse, there is one thing sure, and that is, there is nobody living that ever saw or heard tell of any real boat being on that loch till the shooting tenant puts the one on it this year.

Maclagan Mss: 9053-9054.

F4.B.5 *Loch Dhool*

There is no doubt at all but there is some beast on Loch Dhool that is not natural, and likely enough it is the water horse. A man was telling myself that he was going up there one night, or rather very early in the morning, and he saw a boat and six oars on the loch, as if they were rowing along. And all at once it went out of his sight in fire and smoke. It was very well known there was no boat on the loch at that time. It must have been the each uisge, for it can go into many a shape.

Maclagan Mss: 9054.

F4.B.6 *Applecross*

A reciter says that belief in the existence of water horses was quite common in Applecross, of which he is a native. He knew of one case, it was a man and his wife who were on one occasion near a fresh water loch that is there. The man was a few yards ahead of his wife, and seeing like some commotion in the loch he cried to his wife to come fast, and when she came they both saw what they took for certain to be a water horse. The man described it as a great beast, all white on its breast, and it rose on its hind legs, until it looked nearly as high as the laird's house.

Maclagan Mss: 9144.

F4.B.7 *Loch Lomond*

A native says there is a water horse in a small loch on the hill, between Loch Long and Loch Lomond. There are stories in the place, she says about the horse having been seen, and she herself knew a man who said that he had seen it for certain.

Maclagan Mss: 9198.

F4.B.8 *Loch Glaish*

In general they say the river is not sonsy, nor yet the loch from which it comes being Loch Glaish 3 miles in length. Apparitions they report to be seen about it and that called the Waterhorse. But they think the water is sanctified by bringing water to it from Lochmoire from which Alness river runs. This Loch, which is 2 m. long 5 m. from the church to N.W. owes its sanctity to a chappel at the W. end of it, dedicated of old to the V. Mary. It lyes in a little glen called Glenmoir or Kildermory; all the rent of which Glen would have made but a scrimpt subsistence for the priest, but the hideous remote situation of the place has probably made it be resorted to in pilgrimage.

Mitchell (ed.) 1906-1908, vol. 1: 212-213 [c. 1720].

F4.B.9 *Loch Cashill*

In this Loch at the place where the River of Enrick falls into it, about a mile be west from the church of Buchanan it's reported by the countrymen living ther about, that they sometime sie the Hippotam or Water Horse.

Mitchell (ed.) 1906-1908, vol. 1: 347 [1724].

F4.B.10 *Loch Garradh nan Capull*

Between Baile Nodha and Balmartin there is a loch called Loch Garradh nan Capull where an each uisge used to be seen. A man saw it in the early morning not so very long ago just before the Air Force came to Tiree.

SA1953.85.A12 (from Hector MacLean, Balinoe, Tiree; recorded by C. I. MacLean)

F4.B.11 *Loch A'Garbh Bhaid Beag*

This story is told by John Falconer, Achlyness, Sutherland.

One afternoon in the autumn of 1938, Mary Falconer, a woman of Achlyness in West Sutherland, was taking a short cut with a companion through the hills of Ardchullin with some venison in a sack slung over her shoulder.

On nearing Loch Garget Beag, she noticed a number of ponies grazing by the loch-side. Thinking that one of the beasts – a white one – was her next-door-neighbour's sheltie, and that she would make used ot it for carrying her heavy load on its back the rest of the journey to Rhiconich, she walked towards the animal.

As she came within a few feet of it, however, she discovered that it was a much larger pony than her neighbour's, and to her astonishment, she saw round its neck, entangled with its mane, a cluster of water weeds.

The eyes of the animal and the woman met; and in that instant she sensed that she was looking on an 'each uisge' and on no ordinary beast.

To her amazement, there and then the whole group of about thirteen ponies, on noticing her, galloped to the edge of the water, and plunging into the loch, sank below the surface in front of her eyes.

Her companion corroborated her story in every particular.

The people of Kinlochbervie and district are firmly convinced that LochGarbet Beag houses in its depths not one water-horse, but a whole herd.

Robertson 1961: 142-143.

F4.B.12 *Each-uisge in Lochfyne*

Mr [Campbell, from Lorn] says the belief both in the Each Uisge and Tarbh Uisge (Water Horse and Water Bull) is very common in the district of Lorn, and in fact in the whole of Argyle-shire. He says that a Tarbert man once told him that he one time had seen a monster of some kind swimming up Lochfyne. He could not say at first what it was, but when it raised its head above the water, he saw it was a horse.

Maclagan Mss: 2420-2421.

F4.B.13 *Water horse in Lochfine*

The reciter says that he heard of a Lochgilphead man who one time saw a strange looking beast in Lochfine. It had a head like that of a horse. It was widely believed that it was a water horse.

Maclagan Mss: 5786 (from Mr J. Campbell, a native of Kilbrandon).

F4.B.14 *Water horse at Lone More*

Talking on the subject of the water horse (an t-each-uisge), the reciter, who is a native of the parish of Duirinish, in the island of Skye said that it is believed in in his native place. And he remembers in his own day, when he was a boy, one fine sabbath morning in the spring of the year, when a party of young people, lads and girls, were on their way to the church, and when crossing the hill above Innisdale, just when they came in sight of the church at Lonemore, they saw a water horse down beside the loch.

And as showing how general was the belief in the existence of water horses among the people of the place, the reciter says that when the report went out from the young people of what they had seen, it was accepted on all hands, without doubt or question, so far as was ever heard by the reciter at any rate.

Maclagan Mss: 6549 (from Mr Macinnes, Clachan, Kintyre).

F4.B.15 *Parish of Lochs, Lewis*

On one occasion the reciter was on a visit to the island of Lewis, and was being driven in an open conveyance through a part of the parish of Lochs. The road runs past a certain loch on which there are several small islets, and there was a belief which was pretty common there abouts, that a water horse had been seen in this loch, and there were the usual ideas about the dangers to which passers by were liable. Well, on the occasion to which the reciter referred, when they were passing this loch, the driver kept his eye constantly in the direction of the loch, watching the loch evidently, more than he was watching the horse he was driving. And when they had got quite past the place, where according to his thoughts apparently, danger might be dreaded, breaking the silence which he had maintained for some little time before, he turned to the reciter, showing an air of serious doubt upon his face, and said: 'I thought I saw something moving in the water. Did you see it?'

Maclagan Mss: 6549-6550 (from Mr MacRae, Clachan, Kintyre).

F4.B.16 *Water horse in Loch Bràigh*

There is a fresh water loch, called Loch Bràigh on the hill that rises from the shore on the south side of Lochboisdale. It used to be said that a water horse inhabited this loch, and a shepherd that the reciter's father had there, maintained that he had seen it several times.

Maclagan Mss: 6550 (from John Ferguson, a native of South Uist).

F4.B.17 *Water horse of Loch Garten*

The reciter says that there is a man living near her father's house who says that he is quite certain of having seen the Loch-Garten water horse. He says he did not see it very clearly, for it was at night, but he is quite sure it was it. It had come out of the loch, and was crossing over to Loch Mallachie.

Maclagan Mss: 7171 (from Miss MacGilvray, Garten, Strath Spey).

F4.B.18 *Water horses fight in Loch Garten*

The reciter, referring to the water horse, which she said many believe to be in Lochgarten still, said that there is a woman in Garten who declares that she saw it one time. It was about twelve o'clock in the middle of the day, and she went out to the end of her own house to look if the people were coming home for their dinner, and she saw like two colts fighting in the loch. They were rising on their hind legs in the water, and striking against each other with their fore feet. She says she saw them quite plainly, and they were of a red and white colour.

Maclagan Mss: 7171 (from Mrs Grant, Deshar, Duthil, Invernessshire).

F4.B.19 *Water horse in Loch Aros*

The reciter related the incidents connected with a current report regarding a water horse that was in Aros Loch. The loch is a small one immediately behind Aros house. She said that she herself knew the woman referred to very well, both before she got a fright and after it, and affirms that the story as it is currently told is true beyond questioning.

This is it. A certain woman, whose husband had gone in from Aros to Tobermory one evening, was getting somewhat anxious about him when it was getting a little on in the night, and he had not returned, and she went down a bit to see if she would meet him. When she was going along at the side of the loch, a great big water horse rose out of the water, and gave such a plunge down again, that she felt as if the whole loch, and even the ground below her feet shook. She said that his eyes were as bright as fire, and looked as large as the mouth of a basin. The woman got such a fright that she hardly managed to make her way home, and she never did any good after that.

This is the latest appearance of the water horse that has been found among the Mull traditions, and the story is believed by many representatives of last generation, who say that they got it all first hand from the woman herself, and also from her husband.

Maclagan Mss: 7684 (from Mrs Malcolm Macgillivray, Tobermory).

F4.B.20 *Loch Aros*

There is also another appearance of the Loch Aros water horse of which there are traces. Referring to it a woman that was brought up in the neighbourhood of Tobermory said:

Many a time I heard my mother telling that when she was a girl, she and another girl named Anna Nic Eachern were one day down beside the loch, and they saw the horse in the loch, true enough.

Maclagan Mss: 7684-7685 (from Mrs Donald McLean, Tobermory).

F4.B.21 *Water horse in the Kyles of Bute*

The reciter, who is a fisherman and a native of Tarbert, Lochfyne, said that a man that used to fish with him – one, who he says was truthful and intelligent – often told him of having once seen what he took to be a water horse in the Kyles of Bute. He said it was on a beautiful calm morning. His boat was lying at anchor right opposite Tighnabruaich, but nearer the Bute side of the Kyle. He had come on deck, but the other men were below. It was clear day ligth, and he saw what he took to be a water horse. It was a short distance from the boat. He saw its head and mane and a little of its back, but the rest of it was underwater. He said that all of it, as far as he could see, resembled a horse.

Maclagan Mss: 8962-8963 (from W. McAlister, Tarbert, Lochfyne).

F4.B.22 *The Water-Horse*

The Water-Horse assumes the shape of a man or woman depending on the person whom it meets and entices back to the loch from whence it came. Oral tradition varies regionally concerning the Water-Horse and in some of the stories it appears to us in the form of a small, shaggy horse.

I'll say no more about oral tradition just now, except perhaps to mention the creature I saw myself. Some who read what follows may find it unbelievable, that there is nothing in it but the dreams or ravings of a boy. The thing I saw with my own two eyes is real enough to me, and what's more, someone else saw it too.

When I was about ten years old, I was sent during school holidays to my grandfather and grandmother who stayed about seven miles from us beyond the moor. There was no main road then, nor even a back road worthy of the name. You made your own course from hill to hill and from pass to pass.

The days passed happily and when it came time for me to return home, my granny put a hatch, or brood, of small birds in a basket I was taking back for my mother. To keep me company, and to lighten my burden now and again, she sent Morag, another grandchild of hers, along with me. Morag was a little older than I.

We took the short way to Cachaileith Bhealaich, past Sruthan an Uruisg and up to Druim Dubh. We avoided the Caibeal and kept Achadh a' Charraigh and the Clachan Fiannta between us and the shore. Everything went well for us until we arrived at the north end of the park in which the farmer would keep the sheep for shearing and weaning. What did we see but a number of horses grazing on the flat ground ahead of us. This surprised us because we knew that the farmer only kept two horses, Dandy and Charlie, and anyway that wasn't grazing land for town horses – moor, moss and rank grass. But this did not intimidate us and we kept on and lost sight of the horses.

When we had to ascend a high point to get to Glaic an Dunaich, we followed a stretch of road that went past a big marsh. It wasn't long, nor broad, but it was deep and the heather grew over its banks. It was then that we saw the beast laying on a hillock about fifty yards away. We realised that this was not an earthly creature and without a word between us, we turned back and gained the top of a small sloping hill, keeping this terror always in sight. When we reached the top we got a better view of

the beast and fortunately for us its head could not be seen. It lay with its legs directly underneath, as a pig lays. Only its black tilted body, glistening in the bright sun of Beltane, could be seen. I cannot adequately describe to you how it appeared except as a kind of seal that you would see sunning itself on a rock; only darker. It was like four stumps of hazel keeping up a shepherd's plaid and sheltering its head. It didn't move while we watched but, as you will understand, we did not tary nor utter a sound, but crept on until the thatched bothy of the Buaile came into view. We felt relieved then and it wasn't long until we reached the old home.

We told about the fascinating sight we had seen as soon as we had given the chicks safely over to my mother. They grew up, they laid eggs and at last they were put in the pot!

Those were inside listened to our tale, empathised with us and praised us for being so clever; that we did not lose our senses or our reason. Neither father, mother nor any other high-ranking relative doubted that we had seen something which would strike fear in the strongest hearts. The story went round the island and some still speak of it to this day.

Gairm 18 (from Niall Mac Ghille Sheathanaich).

F4.B.23 *Loch an Fhraig (Benbecula)*

DAM: And now, you were saying about some other people who saw the water-horse?

DAMcE: Yes. One of my own people (someone in my family) saw it. One of our people. Donald son of Young Alasdair MacEachan. He went on some trip or other to the shealing. The women at that time would go to the herds in the summer out of ... This day he was compelled to go out on some trip or other, something they needed, or to be done out around the pasture, and he was a little late coming back in. And soon he was coming past ... Loch an Fhraing they call it today, but it's Loch (Baura?), and he saw this horse coming out of the loch and returning into it, and it had a big long tail. He would say that it was a handful of a colt, by the looks of it.

DAM: And did it go out of sight into the loch?

DAMcE: Out of sight into the loch again.

DAM: Was there not a woman there?

DAMcE: Yes. A woman saw it as she was taking a shortcut home on a Sunday evening. It was after midday Sunday, and she took a great fright.

DAM: And she was at the loch.

DAMcE: At the same loch she was, making for Eilean Floddaigh. She had gone past Staoinndebheil at the time. And she saw the terror that this was on the surface of the loch and she thought it was a horse.

SA1964.55.A1 and A2 (from D. A. MacEachan, Benbecula; interviewed by Donald Archie MacDonald).

F4.B.24 *Loch Archaig*

Domhnall: Now then, what tale is this?

Rebecca: My grandfather's brother was a lobster fisherman in Inbhir Bhaile and he got up early to go after a fox and he saw the water-horse on the shore. Now, that's not a lie at all.

D: And that was at Loch Archaig?

R: Loch Archaig.

D: And did he say what it looked like?
R: Just a small horse.
D: Okay. And he didn't come toward it at all?
R: No, not at all.
D: Right.
R: He went hunting, and he went off and ... He told his brother, my grandfather that he saw it, it was my grandfather's brother, John Stewart, he was a lobster fisherman at Loch Archaig in Inbhir Bhaile and he saw the water-horse. It was in the paper about a month or two ago, but it was talking about this man, John Stewart, but they were wrong about it being at Loch Ness, it was here that it was. Up here ... to put that right, but I can't.
SA1969.179.B5 (from Rebecca Stewart, Lochaber; recorded by J. MacInnes).

F4.B.25 *Loch Buidhe*
Here then, there was a man from Loch Buidhe at the time that he saw the water-horse by the side of Loch Sguaban. He told everybody. The minister heard, this young man, John MacIntyre, he heard what had gone on, as people were telling him, and he said: 'I'll put a stop to it.' He went to the man and he said to him: 'I have heard that you saw the water-horse.' 'I have.' 'Were you close to it?' 'Yes, very close.' 'What colour was it?' 'It was brown.' 'Others,' said the minister, 'who have seen it all say that it was green. Do you think that it wasn't, or was it indeed the same horse?'
SA1953.89.4 (from John MacIntyre, Mull; recorded by C. MacLean).

F4.B.26 *Loch Triochadan*
[Summary] There was supposed to be a water horse in Loch Triochadan. It was seen by several people. One, who was drunk, was frightened into sobriety by it.
SA1959.112.A12 (Anon. male, Ballachulish; recorded by C. MacLean).

F4.B.27 *Dark loch in South Uist*
[Summary] Short account of sighting of each uisge in loch in South Uist. The loch looks rough and dark even in the height of summer.
SA1960.13.A4 (from Ruairi Aonghais, South Uist; recorded by C. I. MacLean).

F4.B.28 *South Uist*
[Summary] Each uisge used to be seen. Believed to be evil spirit.
SA1968.153.A6 (from Marion Campbell, Frobost, South Uist; recorded by A. J and D. A. MacDonald).

F4.B.29 *Machair*
[Summary] Story of a man who saw a water horse while he was out for sheep. A shower fell and he took shelter in a hollow rock, and in the middle of the shower, he saw the water horse rise out of the loch.
SA1969.103.A2 (from Donald MacAulay, Machair; recorded by A. J. and D. A. MacDonald).

F4.B.30 *Loch na Bealaich*

[Summary] A woman saw an each uisge at Loch na Bealaich, on dry land. It looked like 'Loth-ghorm'. The woman never returned there. The informant does not know if it took human form, but it was not a good thing.

SA1972.7.B14 (from James Clark, Kintail; recorded by D. A. MacDonald and I. Fraser).

F4.B.31 *Loch near Stornoway*

[Summary] As a small girl of 4 during the 1914-18 war, on the way to Stornoway with members of her family, as they passed a loch, she saw an each uisge, first as a horse, then as a woman with a creel on her back, and then as a dog. The dog was grey.

SA1977.60.B2 (from Mrs MacDonald, Lewis; recorded by D. A. MacDonald).

F4.B.32 *Water horse in Tongue*

There is a large fresh water loch in the parish of Tongue, a native says, in which people used to say there was a water horse, and there is a story about a girl that was passing that loch. It is not long ago at all. She said that she saw a colt near the loch, but it was out of the water, and coming towards her. She ran, and the colt followed her a good piece, and although she managed to escape, she maintains her firm conviction that it was no ordinary colt, but the water horse.

Maclagan Mss: 8962 (from Miss McKay, Craiglea, Edinburgh).

F4.B.33 *Loch of the one-night shieling*

A man from Leurbost decided to build his shieling bothy beside a pleasant loch, deep in the hill, as the practice was at the time. He took his cattle with him, and settled down to sleep for the first night in the shieling. On hearing strange noises outside, he got up to investigate, and by the light of the full moon, saw a hideous beast with shining eyes emerge from the loch. Not surprisingly, he fled, leaving his bothy and his cattle, and the place was never occupied again. The loch is called Loch Airigh na h-Aon Oidhche, 'the loch of the one-night shieling'. It lies in the hill a few miles to the south of the village of Achmore in Lewis.

Tocher 1977-1978 (27): 182- 183 (from Calum MacArthur, Achmore, Lewis; recorded by Ian Fraser, January 1970).

F4.B.34 *J. McL. and the water-horse*

Belief in the water horse is quite common in Harris, and many profess to have seen it.

J. McL. who died a few years ago, when a young man, was on one occasion accompanying a young woman to her home. He left her at her own door, and took his way along the water edge. He had not gone far until he heard quick running after him, and thinking it was the young woman he turned round, and called, 'Is that you Mary?' There was no answer. Again he called, 'Is it you Mary?', but still there was no reply. He then bent down, and peered through the dark, and saw a large beast almost at him. He had heard of the Red Water Horse, and at once concluded that this was it. He sprang to his feet and ran as fast as he could, the horse following him, until he reached some high rocks which he climbed up. He looked down, and there he saw the horse scenting along the ground where his feet had been. It ran torwards

the water, but returned again: this it did several times. McL. sat on the rock for nearly an hour, the horse remaining about the foot of it. At last, it ran towards the water and rushed in, and when he saw it a good distance away he came down and went home. He said it was higher and leaner than any ordinary horse he had ever seen.

Maclagan Mss: 303 (From Anne McLeod, domestic servant, a native of Bernera, Harris, living at T. C. Manse, Portcharlotte, Islay – written down by Elizabeth Kerr, The Manse, Portcharlotte, 6th Dec. 1893).

F4.B.35 *Woman saw waterhorse*

[Summary] Account of woman who saw a waterhorse.

SA1959.25.B6 (from Angus MacNeill, Smearisary; recorded by C. MacLean).

F4.B.36 *The Water kelpie*

[Summary] The informant was at place near Drum Castle on May 1. Heard splashing in estuary – saw a fawn, neither human or animal, with long hair covering, hands in water. Lizzie ran to Kydd's farm. Told Mrs Kydd of what she saw. Farmer and others told her of fearsome tales about that part of the river: the Water Kelpie always seen c. 11.30am. Told to avoid this stretch, especially on May-Day. On Laird of Drum's estate. Lizzie was about 16 or 17 at the time.

SA1974.289.A5-B1 (Lizzie Higgins, Aberdeen; interviewed by H. Henderson and A. Munro).

F4.B.37 *Eich uisge in Loch Laga and Loch nam Fian*

[Summary] An old man, Alasdair mac Shomhairle, used to see eich uisge in Loch Laga and Loch nam Fian.

SA1967.03.A8 (from Donald Campbell, Salen, Mull; no ref.).

F4.B.38 *Loch Iain Oig.*

Got the above from Kate McLennan, Sarsay [?] who is 95 years of age. She believes in the water-horse and in a great many other things equally as superstitious. She says she herself actually saw him. She was once going to Torridon to see some friends. When at Loch-Damh, between Torridon and Kishorn, she heard a rustling among the heather, and loud whistling. She looked round and saw a slender beast like a young foal with a mane and long shaggy tail sweeping the ground bearing down upon her at full speed. She got terribly frightened, ran up the hill with all her might, and did not look behind her till she arrived at her destination. After arriving, she told what met her. She was told it was the Each-uisge which was very often seen between this loch and one higher up in the hill. She was told that he was so bold that he even used to come to this very doors and they used to put live coals in the doors to keep him off. She says that she ought to be thankful to the Almighty for having protected her from such a monster.

Campbell Mss 50.1.11: ff. 285a-286a (June 13, 1861).

F4.B.39 *Few water horses in Mull*

There [were] not many water horses here [Mull] but there was one seen about a loch at Baille phaih.

Campbell Mss 50.2.4: f. 43. (general conversation between J. F. Campbell and the reciters re Fairy women, Water-Horses, etc.).

F4.B.40 *Barra*

Talking of water horses, an aged man who belongs to the island of Barra said that he had often heard of them, and that a man and his sister who live quite near him, and are about his own age, saw one one time. They were cutting seaweed at the time, and the both saw him quite plainly rising up out of the sea, and immediately plunging back again.

Maclagan Mss: 8121-8122 (from Donald Johnstone, Glen, Barra).

F4.B.41 *Water horses disappear in the whins*

Referring to the belief in the existence of water horses, a native of Kintyre said: You remember the place beside the little burn, where we used to wash sometimes. Well, one night two black horses were seen running up from the shore as hard as they could. They ran up along side of the burn, and away up till they were lost among the whins. People always said that they were water horses.

Maclagan Mss: 5785-5786 (from Mrs Greenlees, Calliburn, Campbeltown).

F4.B.42 *Bernera – John McNeill and the water horse*

The reciter, who is a native of the island of Bernera, on the south west of Barra, related the following incident, illustrating the belief in the existence in water horses. He said:

My mother's brother, John McNeill, was a great boatman. There was not the like of him in all Barra. He had a boat and would be trading among the islands. One time he was in the sound between the islands of Mingulay and Pabbay, and they saw the appearance of a horse rising in the sea some distance from them. One of the crew remarked that it was N. C.'s, that it must have fallen over the rocks (this N. C. was a man that was living on the island of Mingulay at that time, and he had a horse that was very poor, and the man thought that it was that horse). But my uncle said: 'I do not believe that it is N. C.'s horse yet, but however, it is as well for you to keep away from it.' They had a fair breeze, but never mind, they saw that the thing that was in it was coming nearer, and at last it came so near that it lifted its two forefeet on the gunwale of the boat. They said it was just like a horse, only it had not so much hair about its head. My uncle made a spring and got one of the stones they had in the boat for ballast, and threw it out in the sea with a plunge, and just as he wanted, away the each-uisge went after it, and by the time it rose to the surface again, the boat had got a good distance away. But they were making out that had it not been for the favourable wind, and the way my uncle cheated the beast with the stone, it might have cost them their life.

Maclagan Mss: 8122 (from Peter Sinclair, Bernera, Barra).

F4.B.43 *Sea water horse at Barra head*

CM: Have you ever heard mention of a water-horse?

DC: Indeed I have. But there you have another beast that never was.

CM: You've heard news of a water-horse.

DC: Yes. ... And it's ... about the water-horse ... but there was never such a beast, but we'll say something about it anyway.

In a boat that was ... A lobster boat around the islands – Pabbay and Mingulay and Barra Head, they saw the water-horse and it put its legs on the bow of

the boat, and one of those in the boat brought out an elm (branch? stick?) and broke it over its snout, and it went away, and no one was seen more of it. That's the news I heard about it.

CM: Did you get news of a water-horse being in a loch?

DC: Aye. There was one there; the one I heard, it was in the sea. But it isn't good for us to spoil it, we must say that such a thing existed; it doesn't do well for us to spoil the thing.

SA1953.117.A6 (from Donald Campbell, Barra: recorded by C. MacLean).

F4.B.44 *Water horse in Mingulay*

[Summary] The informant's grand-mother saw a water horse, while young girl, cutting seaweed. It was as if shells were growing on it. In her fright she cut her finger very deeply with sickle. It was also seen before the drowning of Pabbay men.

SA1960.87.A7 (from Morag MacKinnon, Vatersay; recorded by L. Sinclair).

F4.B.45 *Water horse in Mingulay (variant)*

Annie: And what about the water-horse?

Nan: They believed in the water-horse long ago and many's the time I heard a tale that my older grandfather had seen it. As things were in Miughalaidh, you know, the ground was so bad around the coast that they could not get manure for the farming at all until it was summertime. So they would have to plant seeds without covering them until the summer came. And when the summer passed they would pick the sea tangle and spread it over the back of the ... Anyway, this day a boat was going out to catch lobster and my grandmother went with them, as she was ... And they left her on the island by herself. There are many small islands around there. They left her on her own on this small island. She picked the langadal, as they call it ... Have you ever seen the langadal?

A: Yes.

N: Right, langadal. She was picking langadal anyway ... and she was so busy picking langadal, and eventually she heard this noise, and the ground rose up and gave her such a fright that she almost lost a finger by the sickle. When she looked around, there was the horse ... he was rising after he had made the noise. A gray horse with ridges on his back like little ... You see things on the shore, little hard things as if they were ..., just things that grow hard with ... Things like that were on his back. And they say that the Pabbay folk saw it after that. They say that it is not fortunate at all for one to see it. The Pabaich ... the Pabaich is what they would call the people of Pabbay.

SA1964.77.B13 (from Nan MacKinnon, Vatersay; interviewed by A. Ross).

[The same anecdote occurs in SA1965.06.B6, from the same informant]

F4.B.46 *The waterhorse and the racehorses*

MacPhail, the Caiftin Mor's (laird's) gamekeeper, saw a horse at the end of MacKenzie island when he was out fishing. It vanished under the sea. It was thought to be an each uisge attracted by the shadow of the racehorses the Caiftin Mor kept on MacKenzie island. The each uisge was never seen since the racehorse were taken off MacKenzie island.

SA1966.30.B5 (from Neil Ferguson, Islay; no ref.).

F4.B.47 *Waterhorse swimming in loch*

Water horses. A man told me this. I believe his sister married coibair, a shepherd. When he was a lump of a boy they said that he had better go and make hay. He was not willing but he went up the country about forty miles to his sister's house.They said one day that he had better go to fetch the milk cows. He went to the moor near a loch in which there was eileann mòr, a tiny island. He sat there a while. He saw a horse swimming in the loch. He landed and sunned himself and after a while he went out again into the loch and dived.

Well I have never met the man that saw the water horse. Though I have often met the man who had met the man. Well then I met that man and he told me this. At loch Triochadail is a horse. One man saw him like an eel as long as two boats.

A man Macquaire, a fine lad who lived here with his mother, had a fine horse. One Sunday he put the horse out and the horse put him out of his boat, and he was drowned. He was dead before we could do anything *cha marbh ri sgadan* as dead as a herring. The fine lad, *an gille gasda.*

Campbell Mss 50.2.2: ff. 242-243 (Sept 20, 1870? – not on map)

C – ANECDOTES AND GENERAL COMMENTS

F4.C.1 *Family of kelpies in the Reay Country*

A native of the County of Sutherland said that there was a family of kelpies at one time in the Reay Country. Their father was an ordinary man, but their mother was of the Bean nighidh kind. The reciter says that he himself saw some that were descended from them. They were working at the Highland Railway, and were as respectable as other people.

Maclagan Mss: 7323.

F4.C.2 *The offspring of Loch Ghrimsaidh's each uisge*

A current story tells of an each uisge that was at one time in Loch Ghrimsaidh, from which a certain family was supposed to have sprung, and on this account used to be called siol an t-each uisge (the descendants of the water horse). One time a lad was courting a girl. She belonged to a family of those who were said to have been descended from the water horse, and the lad's mother, who was not at all satisfied with her son's choice made a song to him, in which she described some of the girl's distant ancestors on their mother's side, as having come out of the loch, and having been clothed with skin.

Maclagan Mss: 3354-3355 (from Mrs Morrison, Portcharlotte, Islay).

F4.C.3 *The industrious neighbour*

A native of Uist says that belief in the existence of eich uisge (water horses) was very common in Uist. In his native parish there was a man who was more industrious than his neighbours. He used to be up early and continued working often till it would be pretty late. He was not a favourite among the people, and when it was seen that his ploughing was so far forward compared with other people's, they did not realize that his industrious habits accounted for it, the story went about that he was making use of an each uisge in his plough under the cover of night, and people did not care to have much to do with him.

Maclagan Mss: 3352 (from M. Macdonald, a native of Uist).

F4.C.4 *St Vigeans*

From the year 1699 to 1736, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper had never been dispensed in this church. A tradition had long prevailed here, that the water-kelpy (what Mr. Hume, in his tragedy of Douglas, calls 'the angry spirit of water') carried the stones for building the church; that the foundation of it was supported upon large bars of iron; and that under the fabric there was a lake of great depths. As the administration of the Sacrament had been so long delayed, the people had brought themselves to believe, that the first time ordinance should be dispensed, the church would sink, and the whole people would be carried down and drowned in the lake. The belief of this had taken such hold of the people's minds, that on the day the sacrament was administered, some hundreds of the parishioners sat on an eminence about hundred yards from the church, expecting every moment the dreadful catastrophe. They were happily disappointed; and this spirit of credulity 'soon vanished, like the baseless fabric of a vision'.

Aitkin, 1793: 622-623.

In the *New Statistical Account* of 1845, it is written that:

For a few years after 1727, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not dispensed, under a superstitious notion, from the circumstance of the minister committing suicide, that the church was destined to be engulphed in the surrounding hollow, if that ordinance should be administered. (vol. 11: 497)

The author from the *New Statistical Account* combines in fact two stories concerning St Vigeans, both given in the *Old Statistical Account.*

F4.C.5 *The sheep stealer*

A native of Uist says that there are plenty of stories current in his native place about water horses, but he does not think there are many people now who believe that there were ever such a thing in it. There was one man who used to declare that he had often seen it, but he was looked upon as a great sheep stealer, and people did not heed much his stories about the wild things he would be seeing, for it was thought he just wanted to frighten folk from the places where he would be carrying on his thieving.

Maclagan Mss: 7686 (from Mr A. Macleod, a native of Uist).

F4.C.6 *Waterhorse in the rushes*

[Summary] Anecdote about the informant's uncle and another man returning from a poaching trip. His uncle was sure that he saw a water horse across the loch. It was only rushes bending in the wind.

SA1955.161.A6 (Murdo John MacLean, Achiltibuie; no fieldworker name).

F4.C.7 *Waterhorse in burn (Skye)*

My mother used to frighten us ... there was a burn, a stream running down not too far from our house. ... And it ran down to the river. Well, it was very steep going down to the river and of course she would always be busy, you know, there was such a lot to do. And so that we wouldn't go near this river she would say to us (in Gaelic of course!) 'Now if you go near that river the water horse will get you', and we believed every word of it. '*Na teid faisg air an amhuinn no beiridh*.

an t-each uisg' ort'. ... Oh well, this is what we heard, and we were always scared of the river because we were convinced the *each uisge* would get us.

Bennett 1997 [1991]: 95.

F4.C.8 *Waterhorse and other creatures*

[Summary] Children used to be threatened with the Each Uisge if they weren't well behaved. They were very frightened by this. Mention of other supernatural water creatures. People believed there were creatures that would come and do jobs for them if they left food in the barns – e.g. porridge, oatmeal, cheese. Many people believed in fairies.

SA1964.69.B7 (from Lexy Walker, Fortingall; recorded by A. Ross).

F4.C.9 *The Waterhorse*

[Summary] As children, people used to frighten them into staying from burns, by saying the water horse would catch them. Old people strongly believed in the water horse.

SA1964.17.A12 (from William Forbes, Killin; recorded by A. Ross).

F4.C.10 *An t-each Ronach's a mial chu*

Two men at the kelp in Ronay – took old mare with them and left it behind. The following year, the mare had a fine foal, which grew into an excellent horse, very fast horse. The landlord took it but Uisdean a' Bhaile Shear wanted to buy it. A race between the horse and Uisdean's greyhound was organised. The greyhound was killed when he crashed into a door at high speed. Landlord discovered that Uisdean was treating the people of Baleshare very harshly and put him out of his land. The informant thinks that the horse came from the each uisge.

SA1969.103.A1 (from Donald MacAulay, Machair; recorded by A. J. and D. A. MacDonald).

F4.C.11 *Loch Ness Monster*

[Summary] The informant says that the water horse was the same as the Loch Ness monster. She gives references to books, publishers of legends.

SA1972.242.B2 (from Nancy Currie, North East Scotland; recorded by Tadaaki Miyake).

F4.C.12 *Calum MacArthur at Camshader and the Water-Horse*

[Summary] Beg Chalum MacArthur at Camshader was mostly ruined by this monsters – Eich uisge or water horses, destructive both on cattle and human beings. With other ends attached to them would form in so many shapes and often in the shape of a young woman... MacArthur and another man kept their cattle on the Island of Flota. The each uisge killed some of the man's cattle, who asked MacArthur to pay for them. MacArthur was so furious he decided he would go and kill this man at his home. So he went with his three sons, but one got sick on the way and died. They landed his corpse and went to kill the man.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: f. 74 (2nd Story – May 1860)

F4.C.13 *Tale of the water horse*

(12) Here slipped in a little bit about water horses. Are there many water horses

here? They are not so numerous now as they used to be. But there were plenty of them in fresh water lochs. What were they like? Oh just like other horses. Mac fir Arois used to catch them with ropes in this loch. They say that the ropes broke once and he threw his arms about the [horse']s neck and it ran into the loch water with him. His heart and liver were found next morning on the opposite shore of this loch up here. They say that a man was bringing two young ones home in a ship from [Appin] not long ago, but he could not keep them alive. They died. And they are not common here now ... as they used to be. All thus given with the utmost perfect good faith, calmly and naturally, without the least suspicion of the questioner. Well I have never seen a man who has seen a water horse. Well well, you might have seen plenty here who had seen them. They were just like other horses? Yes. But they lived in the lochs? Yes.

Campbell Mss 50.2.2: f. 140 (from Mr. MacLean, 8th September, 1870)

F4.C.14 *Niall Ruadh in South Uist*

Belief in the existence of the Water horse (Each uisge) is quite common among the peasantry of Barra. Talking on the subject to two natives of the island – fishermen – one of them referred to a man whom he called Niall Ruadh, a shepherd in South Uist, who used to hunt a water horse off his ground into the sea, with his dogs. Appealing to his companion as to whether he had not heard that, the companion said 'Oh, I heard it many a time', and they were saying it was quite true (O chual mi iomadh uair e, agus bha iad ag radh gun robh e gle fhior).

Maclagan Mss: 8118.

F4.C.15 *Kelpie in shallow pool*

The informant explains that people were very afraid of darkness, then relates an anecdote about an old man who claimed to have seen a kelpie. People really believed him and spent a long time looking for it in a very shallow pool which 'wouldn't take a duck'!

SA1989.213.A22 (from Donald MacDonald, Eriskay; recorded by L. J. McKnight, C. MacLellan).

F18. *Supernatural Beings Haunt Mill

B1 – WATERHORSE

F18.B1.1 *The boar and the kelpie*

A miller was annoyed by a kelpie entering his mill during night and playing havoc among the grain and meal. One night he shut up in the mill his boar, for a miller generally kept a good many pigs and a breeding sow or two. As usual kelpie entered the mill. The boar stood on his defence, and fought the kelpie. Next night the creature appeared at the miller's window, and called to him, 'Is there a chattie i' the mill the nicht?' 'Aye, there is a chattie i' the mill, an will be for ever mair', was the answer. Kelpie returned no more to the mill.

Gregor 1883: 293.

F18.B1.2 *Kelpie steals meal*

A kelpie in Braemar, on Deeside, had taken a liking for a woman that dwelt not far from the mill of Quoich. This woman fell out of meal, and had not very good means of supplying her want. Kelpie resolved to come to her help. So one night, on which he knew corn was being ground at the mill, he went to it after the miller had left it. In those old days mills ground very slowly, and it was not unusual for the miller to put as much grain into the hopper as would keep the mill at work till he got up next morning. So it was in this case. Kelpie entered the mill and patiently waited till the sack that received the grain was full. He then lifted the sack on his back, and left the mill. It was 'the grey o' the morning', and the miller had left his bed, and was coming to the mill to see that all was going well. He spied a tall man coming round the corner of the mill, carrying a sackful of meal on his back. Seizing the 'fairy-whorl' that was lying at one of the mill-corners, he hurled it at the man with the oath and threat, 'Kelpie, or nae kelpie, G—d d— you, a'll brack your leg'. The stone took effect and broke the leg. The kelpie made for the 'mill-lead' (mill-race), tumbled into it, was carried by it into the river Dee, and drowned. This was the last kelpie that lived in the Braes o' Mar.

Gregor 1889: 201 (from D. McHardy in Ardjerige).

F18.B1.3 *Kelpie of Garchory mill*

It was before carts were much in use, and when everything had to be carried on the backs of horses. One dark night a man named M'Hardy set out from Brochroy to Garchory mill to fetch home some meal. On arrival at the mill he left his horse at the door, and entered to fetch out the bags of meal. No sooner was the animal left alone than he started for home. The farmer, on coming out to load his horse, found no horse. He was in much distress, as there was no meal at home; and he gave vent to his feelings in woeful words: 'Ma wife an bairns 'ill be a' stervt for wint o' mehl afore I win hame. I wis (wish) I hed ony kyne (kind) o' a behst, although it war (were) a water kelpie.' Hardly were the words spoken when a horse having a halter over his head appeared. The farmer approached him, and the horse allowed himself to be handled, and showed himself quite gentle, putting his head right on the man's breast. The man's distress was turned into joy, and the gentle horse was loaded, and led quietly to the farm-house. On arriving, the farmer tied him to an old harrow, till he should unload him, and carry the meal into the house. When he came out of the house to stable the animal that had done him the good turn, horse and old harrow

were gone, and he heard the plunging of the beast in a big pool of the Don, not far from his house. He went to examine the stable, and found his own horse quietly standing in.

Gregor 1889: 199.

B2– NJUGGLE

F18.B2.1 *Nuggle as a Shetland pony*

In addition to the more strictly speaking marine monsters, a semi-aquatic monster known as the *Nuggle*, or *Shoopiltee*, is found haunting burns and lochs. The nuggle, who has the outward form of a Shetland pony, except that instead of a tail he has some sort of wheel appendage, which, however, is carefully concealed from the observer, has a knack of entrapping passers-by to take a ride on him. No sooner, however, is he mounted than he rushes into the nearest loch and endeavours to drown his rider. He is also given to stopping mills when at work and can only be put to flight by dropping a little brand down the shaft-hole.

Tudor 1883: 169.

F18.B2.2 *Shoopiltie's Holie*

The Shoopiltie was a water-demon; some sort of water-kelpie, and west from Tangwick there's a round hole in the ground; a slope of grass, ending in a sort of churn-like hole, down to the sea. And the story was that Shoopiltie appeared as a black horse from this hole, I think before bad weather, and had a run around and then he disappeared down this hole in a streak of blue flame, sometimes he was seen riding out to sea. But there's a story that goes, about the old man from Tangwick – I think he lived in house called ... here – and there's a water-mill, not long ago this water-mill was still in use, not that long ago, about forty years ago maybe. And this old man went down to this water-mill, with his cassie of corn on his back, and he was alone. It was a winter night, and dark. He had his little light in the mill, and he ground his corn, and when he came out, there was a bit of moonlight; and he had his cassie of meal on his back; and it was going to be a bit of a load up to Tanwick. And then he saw a lovely little horse, black horse, standing outside of the mill. And he thought: 'That's a handy way out; I'll jump on its back and carry my corn meal home easily'. So he got on the little horse's back, and it was very tame, and they started out. But as he was trying to guide it home, it seemed to always go for the west wind, he could not get to guide it ..., and it put on speed, and put on speed: at last he began to wonder. And then he saw that it was heading straight down the west ness, and he began to wonder about this, and at last he decided that this must be Shoopiltie himself. And he couldn't get it stopped, and it flew down the west ness, straight for the rocks. The old man had the presence of mind to throw himself off over its tail, cassie of meal and all, just as it disappeared down this Shoopiltie's hole in a streak of blue flame. And that's all I know about Shoopiltie.

SA1960.219.A7 (from Mrs Rosabel Blance, Northmavine, Shetland; recorded by T. Anderson).

F18.B2.3 *Njugle in Mill*

Weel, dis njugle in Shetland wis a thing that they feared very very much, mebbe about two hundred year ago. And it wis aboot da time dat they wir carryin' all their

grain, their corn, an da bere an aa. Dey hed in dat time mills, and dis mills wis near burns. An' dey wir lochs at da tops o' the hills dat dey tuk..., an' dey tuk... dis mills an' they hed ta go an' open it. An' dey wir a man frae Newfield, in Aest Yell, dat tuk a bag of corn on his back, an' he went tae dis mill wi' da bag o' corn, an' set at doon headed tae da mill. An' da place whar da mill wis built is da Winyadepla, an' its aboot by Aest Yell, atween dat and Mid Yell. An' then he hed ta go awa up tae the top o' da hill, an' in a park dat's called Peter Brown's Park. An' dey wir a lock down den dere, in de olden time, and he güd doon tae da mill, an he wis supposed ta grind dis sack o' corn, an he never returned. An' dis wife hed two children, an dey wir lyin' in into da bed in Newfield; an' da boy wis supposed ta be five years old, an he waukened an' sed: 'Mammy, daa's dead oot, daa's dead oot'. An' she says: 'Wheesh, boy!', she says 'Dere nothin' o' da kind.' But da mornin cam, an' dey wir no father dat came, an' then they made a search, an' then da mill was overthrown, an' dey took his body oot o' da underhous o' da mill. An' it wis supposed ta be da njugle dat was upset da mill, an' him yonder where da heart o' de mill himseel. An' his body was ta'en an' it was buried close to da burn in da Winyadepla, an' ye kin see da marks o' da headstone an' da footstone yet; an' dat'll be aboot two hundre' year ago. An' dat's all I know.

I – Now, had they any idea, a description of the njugle? What was it? Was it an animal like a horse?

BH – That's right. They said that it was like a horse.

I – Yes. And did it ... did it stay in the water?

BH – Yes, they said so.

I – And it had some different ... in mills?

BH – Yes. It was mills dat it always tormented.

I – Yes, I see.

BH – So in dat times it was always two 'at went to da mill, far faer dat da njugle came. An' there was one always on watch. An' he was supposed to come in trou da trough o' da mill an' overthrow da mill.

SA1954.113.4 (from Brucie Henderson, Arisdale, Shetland; recorded by C. MacLean).

F.18.B2.4 *The Nuggle*

With regards to the legendary attributes of the Nuggle, he was belived to be more deceitful than courageous; and his sole bent seemed to be to play mischievous pranks on the human race. I am not aware of any Shetland word that connects the name with water, but the tradition is that the Nuggle was never found at any distance from the water; generally frequenting a footpath near a loch or a burn on which water-mills were built. The object the Nuggle had in frequenting footpaths near a loch, was to offer his services to any unsuspecting wayfarer who might feel disposed to take advantage of them, in order to facilitate his progress, if likely to be benighted. In form he was exactly like a pony, with the exception of his tail, which was said to resemble the rim of a wheel, but which he cunningly kept concealed between his hind legs, when he meant to victimise any pedestrian; and woe be to the man who bestrode him without examining that appendage! It was not stated whether he used his tail as a means of locomotion or not; but no sooner had he felt the weight of his victim, than with lightning speed he flew into the water, and the equestrian found himself submerged beyond his depth, and if he ever gained the shore, it was no fault

of the Nuggle. He did not, however, attempt attack; but it is said when the rider got his head above water, he saw him disappear in cloudy vapour or blue flame.

This was one of his pranks, the other was alleged to be played on people grinding corn at the water-mill. All of a sudden the mill would stand still, while the water was running on the wheel, or 'tirl' in full power. This was very unpleasant to an individual who was alone in the mill in the night – perhaps a mile from the nearest habitation. The cure for this was to throw a fire-brand down the 'lightning-hole' in the 'looder'. It appears the miscreant can't stand fire, for no sooner is the cure applied than he lets go his hold of the 'tirl', and the machinery is again in motion. Numerous instances are recorded, illustrating both these phases of his propensity to work mischief.

Black (ed.) 1901: 190-191.

F18.B2.5 *The Neugle*

The Finns were said to be the only beings who could safely ride the *Neugle*. The *neugle* or *nicker* was a water deity that appeared in the form of a sleek horse, having an erect mane and tail like the 'rim o' a muckle wheel'. He frequented the banks of burns and the margins of lonely lakes, playing his pranks on water-mills (where the owner had neglected to give him an offering) by stopping the tirl. If any luckless nocturnal wanderer, mistaking the *neugle* for a real horse, should get astride the uncanny beast, he was at once borne with the swiftness of an arrow into the middle of the nearest lake or dam, and there left struggling in the water, while he beheld the creature rushing towards the opposite shore like a streak of *mareel*. It is not said that anyone was ever actually drowned by the *neugle*. But the Finns could ride the water horse, and were supposed to utilise him in some of their rapid movements.

Spence 1899: 23-24.

F18.B2.6 *Neogle*

There is also a 'trow' called a 'Neagle', somewhat akin to the water-kelpie of other lands, who makes his appearance about mills, particularly when grinding, in the shape of a beautiful poney. That he may attract the attention of the person who acts the part of the miller, he seizes and holds fast the wheel of the mill; and, as is natural, the miller goes out to examine into the cause of the stoppage; when, to his astonishment, a beautiful poney saddled and bridled, is standing and ready to be mounted; who but an old miller could let slip such a fair opportunity for a ride? But if he should neglect warnings, and unguardedly put his foot in the stirrup, his fate is sealed. Neither bit or bridle avail him any thing. Of goes the poney, bog or bank arrest not his course, till in the deep sea he throws his rider and himself evanishes in a flash of flame. But some millers are proof against the temptation, having been taught caution by the fate of others; and instead of taking a ride, salute his Neogleship with a fiery brand through the lightning-tree hole, which makes him immediately scamper away.

Such are some of the prevailing superstitious notions, which have no doubt been derived from the early Scandinavian settlers...

Bryden 1845, 15: 142.

F18.B2.7 *The Nuggle*

The Nuggle was a water-spirit of near kin to the Marool and Tangie, but he was a more feeble sort, and given to playing silly tricks. He lived in burns and mill-dams, and the worst harm he ever did was to frighten children by suddenly lifting his crest out of the water when the mill-wheel was spinning round.

It is true he was reported to have followed girls from the mill to their own door, but he never carried off any lass. The dread of the Nuggle kept bairns from playing by deep, swift burns or dangerous mill-dams. So that parents rather like the Nuggle, and told the little ones that Nuggle made a pretty song if they stood away from the burns and listened; but he carried away to the sea any child that came near him!

Saxby 1932: 140-141.

F48. Supernatural Taken for Cripple. Helped until Discovered to Have:

B – Webbed feet

F48.B.1 *The Web-footed Kelpie*

A very old, coarse, and dirty banshee belongs to a small sheep-farm of Mr Dempster's. A shepherd found her lying, apparently crippled, at the edge of a moss, and compassionately offered her a lift on his back. In going, he espied her feet, which were dangling down his back, and seeing she was web-footed, he threw her off, flung away the plaid on which she had lain, and ran as if for his life.

Dempster 1888: 228. (Not in map)

F56. Other Tales of *Supernatural Suitor Foiled or Driven away (Cf. ML 6000: 'Tricking the Fairy Suitor'; cf. F143 *Mi fhein*)

A – WATERHORSE

F56.A.1 *Kelpie seeking human companionship*

A young woman was on a journey. Night came down, and she lost her way. After wandering a little, she came to a place which seemed likely to give her shelter for the night. She entered, and composed herself to such rest as she could draw out of her resting-place. By-and-by a little dog came, and lay down by her side. Shortly after kelpie made his appearance, and said to her, 'Mack bed, bonnie lass, a'll lie wi' you the nicht.' She was at a loss what to say or do to keep kelpie away. The doggie came to her help, and told her to say she had no blankets wherewith to make a bed. She said, 'I hive nithing t' mack a bed wi'.' Kelpie disappeared, but returned after a little and threw into the place, where the woman and the dog were, a quantity of bedding, and repeated his former words: 'Mack bed, bonnie lass, for a'll lie wi' you the nicht.' What was now to be done? The doggie again came to the rescue. 'Tell him y're thirsty, an' bid him fess a drink in sieve an rivven dish', said the cunning animal. She did so, and kelpie set off to fetch the water. He soon came back with the complaint: 'They winna haud in'. 'Then stop them wi' fog'. Away went kelpie to gather fog (mosses), and to stop up the meshes of the riddle, and the crack in 'the rivven dish'. Hard did kelpie toil, but still the water escaped. By the time he came back, day had dawned, and the maiden was free.

Gregor 1883: 294.

F56.A.2 *The Water-Horse*

The water-horse was in the habit of coming to visit a particular woman when she was alone. Her man put on a woman's clothes and he began to spin a distaff. The water-horse came as usual. He showed up at the door. When he saw who is in, he would not come further. But he started to say:

'That distaff that you have there
And a beard on your mouth'.

CW 5, f. 24A.

F56.A.3 *The Water-Horse (variant)*

Essentially the same as *CW* 5, f. 24A above.

CW 108, f. 41A (A. Carmichael)

F56.A.4 *Waterhorse in the Fleet*

Note: A golden horse was once seen, born of the waters of the Fleet. It tempted a woman to follow and try to admire it, but she was warned in time, and so it was foiled of its aim to lure her to a watery grave.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff. 34a-34b.

F57. Waterhorse as Young Man Seduces Girl; they Marry and Have Children; she Escapes. (he Sings a Lullaby)

F57.1 *Girl marries water horse*

Here is a Barra story of a water horse which the reciter says obtained unquestioned credence among the people of that island. [Gaelic version]

I heard about a girl that was in the hill one day, and a gentleman came where she was, and he talked to her for a while, and he went away. Every day after that, as sure as she would go to the hill, he would be there too, and he would come where she would be. She thought all the time that he was a right (real) man, and at the latter end, a day that was there, he put the question to her, would she be willing to marry him, and she said that she would be. They married. But it was not long till she began to be astonished (lit. to take wonder) that he would not wait at home at all, but away through the hill every day. However, never mind, a day of the days, when he was preparing to go away as usual, he said to her: 'Which would you prefer, me to be a man, or me to be a horse?' She got such a start, that she did not know what she should say to him, and she did not say a word. He lifted her on his back, and in a minute he was turned to the form of a horse, and he went away with her, and she was not able to leave him.

He went to a little island that was in the middle of a large loch that was there, and there was a kind of house on the island where they took (up their) dwelling. They had children there, but it was not right children, but as if they were a kind of beasts. She was all the time watching an opportunity to escape, and one day, when she was away in some direction, as he frequently was, she saw a boat on the loch, and she waved at them. The men saw her, and they made for where she was. There was not, but that she got in, and the boat putting out from the land, when her husband came in sight. He cried to her to come back, but she would not come, and when he saw this, he went, and he brought the children down to the shore, and he commenced to tearing them asunder in her sight, thinking that that would make her, that she would turn. But it did not, for she was too well pleased getting away from him. She left him there, and she never saw him from that.

Maclagan Mss: 8297-8299 (from Maggie Macdonald).

F57.2 *Girl marries water horse (variant)*

A girl who comes from the island of Barra says there are still those there who believe in the existence of the water horse. It is said that one has been seen not long ago in a loch. A story which the reciter says she has often heard told as having been quite true, she related, and is given here in her own form. [Gaelic version]

One time of old, a girl went to cut rushes beside a loch that was there, and while she was at it, she saw the appearance of a handsome gentleman coming where she was. When he had come forward, he spoke to her, and he asked her if she would be willing to go with him, and that he would make a lady of her. She said that she would. There was no more about it. He lifted her on his back, and in a minute, he turned to be a horse, and he went away with her on his back. He came to an island where he had a hut, and when he put her down there, he said to her that this was the home they were to have together, and he put the question to her, whether she would prefer him to be a man by day, and a horse by night, or a horse by day and a man by night. They were there, without a creature on the island but themselves, and he would

be away every day in the appearance of a horse, but when he would come home in the evening, he would be a man. He gave her no food but raw food, and in course of time, they had ugly children like himself.

The girl was watching every day to see if she might find an opportunity to leave the island, and at last, she saw a boat, and when she waved a garment, those who were in the boat understood how the matter was, and they came, and they took her with them. She was not but after having gone away when the water horse came home, and he saw her leaving the shore in the boat. He went into a great rage, and he took the children to a rock, and he began to draw them to pieces before her eyes, trying if that would make her take pity, and come back, but it did not, and (she) did not return. Then he jumped into the sea, to follow the boat, but before he overtook them they had reached the land on the other side. This way the girl managed to flee, but for many a day after that, she was the fright of her heart [sic], for fear that the water horse might come upon her by surprise.

Maclagan Mss: 8687-8690 (from Maggie MacDonald, Eoligary, Barra).

F57.3 *Marriage – lullaby*

There was another story current in Lewis of a water horse that courted a girl in the form of a man, and married her. She found out, too late, what he was, and after the birth of their son, the girl left the horse and the baby, and went back to her parents. The horse seemed to be sorry, and they used to hear him singing a mournful lullaby to the baby, telling it how its mother had gone away, and left it without the means of living.

Maclagan Mss: 9130.

F57.4 *A Mhor, a Mhor till ri d' mhacan*

A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till ri d'mhacan
A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till ri d'mhacan
'S gheibh thu luidean breac a' lochain
A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till ri d'mhacan
'S gheibh thu liuidean breac a' lochain
Gur fuar a nighean gur fuar a nighean air a' lochan
Och nan och mar a tha mi nochd leat.
Gur fuar a nighean gur fuar a nighean air a' lochan.
Och nan och mar tha mi nochd leat.
A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till ri d'mhacan
A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till ri d'mhacan
'S gheibh thu luidean breac a' lochan.

Mor, Mor, come back to your little son
Mor, Mor, come back to your little son
And you'll find a poor speckled urchin of the loch
And you'll find a poor speckled urchin of the loch
Mor, Mor, come back to your little son
It's cold, girl, it's cold, girl, on the loch
Och nan och how I am tonight with you

It's cold, girl, it's cold, girl, on the loch
Och nan och how I am tonight with you
Mor, Mor, come back to your little son
Mor, Mor, come back to your little son
And you'll find a poor speckled urchin of the loch.

Calum: And now, you were saying that the water-horse ...
Annie: It's the water-horse who made that song. The water-horse made that song and he had a baby from this woman, and she ran away.
Calum: She ran away and he longed for her to return.
Annie: He wanted her to return: 'Mor, Mor, come back to your little son and you'll find a poor speckled urchin of the loch ...'.
Calum: And it's your mother that the song is from?
Annie: It's from my mother that I heard that song. Yes.
SA1954.26.1 (from Mrs Annie Arnott, Skye; recorded by C. I. MacLean)

F57.5 *Lullaby*

Dh'èirich mi moch, dh'èirich mi moch	I got up early (2)
B'fheàrr nach d'dh'èirich,	Better had I not
Mo chreach lèir a chuir a-mach mi	My utter devastation it
Hill ó bha hó, hill ó bha hò	was that sent me out.
Bha laogh mo laoigh (2)	The calf of my calf (2)
Ri taobh cnocain,	was by a hillock
Gun teine, gun tuar, gun fhasgadh	with no fire or comfort or shelter.
Hill ó bha hó, hill ó bha hò.	
A Mhòr, a ghaoil, a Mhòr, a ghaoil,	Mor, my love, Mor, my love
Taobh ri d'mhacan	Bond with your son.
Bheir mi goidean brèagha breac dhut	I'll give you a pretty speckled band/ bangle/or string of beads.
Hill ó bha hó, hill ó bha hò	
Bheir mi dhut fion, bheir mi dhut fion	I'll give you wine, I'll give you wine
Gach nì b'ait leat	Everything you would like,
Bheir mi goidean brèagha breac dhut	I'll give you a pretty speckled band/bangle/or string of beads.
Hill ó bha hó, hill ó bha hò	

SA1960.118.A4 (from Nan Mackinnon, Vatersay, Barra; recorded by L. Sinclair).

F57.6 *Variant of* SA1960.118.A4
Dh'èirich mi mall, dh'èirich mi mall
B'fheàrr nach d'dh'èirich
Mo chreach lèir a thug a-mach mi

Hill ó bha hó, hill ó bha hò

'S a Mhòr a ghaoil (3)
Till ri d'mhacan
Gheibh thu 'n gadan buaidheach breac bhuam
Hill ó bha hó, hill ó bha hò

Tha laogh mo ghaoil (3)
Ri taobh cnocain
Gun teine, gun tuar, gun fhasgadh
Hill ó bha hó, hill ó bha hò

From Donald Macintyre, Paisley (this is virtually the same as 4).

F57.7 *Each-uisge in Eigg*

On another occasion the 'each-uisge' was more successful – he carried off a girl, and actually married her in his 'talla fo'n loch'. She lived with him for a year and a day and then managed to escape, leaving her baby behind. The 'each-uisge' found nursing 'gey ill wark', and composed a most touching lullaby full of appeals to his wife to come back and to the child to stop its howl and shrieks. The lullaby begins 'A Mhor, a Mhor, till ri d' mhacan'. It is claimed by several places.

Watson 1908-1909: 53.

F57.8 *The Girl who went off with the Water-Horse*

Amongst all the unholy creatures in which our forefathers believed, the water-horse was the King of Terrors. It was appear to men as a wild and hideous horse with the head and shoulders of a man. When it would encounter women, and especially young girls, it would go in the form of a nice young man, handsome in appearance, who would in a flash entice them with comeliness of person and beauty of eye to acompany him to his homeland under the high banks of a loch out in the moor.

One day he encountered a Skye girl tending cattle and, as she was struck by his handsomeness, she agreed to go away with him. After they had walked through a long and dark moor, they came at last to the said loch. And when they reached together the water-horse's cave, the poor girl realised, too late, who she had with her. He carried her inside with him and there he put a large stone, such that no one living could move save himself, to block the entrance of the cave.

Now it was customary for the water-horse to go away fishing every morning and to be out most of the day. Each morning that he would go fishing, he made sure to set the large stone back into the entrance so that the woman could not escape.

Mor spent many a day like this, captive to the water-horse and, according to the story, a baby boy was born to them as lovely as was ever seen. After several months had passed, what happened but that the water-horse went out to fish and, whatever it was that caused him to forget that day, he left without putting the stone back into the entrance. Mor noticed this and she took the chance. When she thought that the man of the house was settled down nicely on the banks of a loch about three miles away, she made a dash for town. She reached the house safely but, my poor thing, she wasn't long there before the love of a mother overcame the fear of the water-horse and her mind would not rest day or night. Her longing was so true, one particular

evening, that she said to herself that she would go back to the cave and go softly to the baby, if only to see him even once. When she arrived she found the sight she most desired, for the large stone was not in the doorway. She crept over and looked in. What did she see but a sight that would soften the hardest heart. The water-horse was sitting on a stone and sorrowfully singing a lullaby to the baby. These were the words to the lament-song he made, and the air of it, as I heard an old woman singing it, was just as affecting as the words:

Mor, Mor, come back to your little son
You'll get the speckled withe tonight
My old gray cloak round your small tender mouth
As I sing you a tune.

I can still imagine that I'm listening to that handsome old Highland woman telling the story. And as she was finishing the tale, I would say that she felt far more pity for the water-horse, though being who he was, than for Mor once she'd got her freedom.

SA 1956.13.B1 (from Rev. Norman MacDonald, Glenelg, Skye – no fieldworker name).

F57.9 *Oran an Eich-uisge*

Here is the Water-kelpie's song as I heard my grandmother sing it.

A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till ri d'mhacan
Till ri d'mhacan, till ri d'mhacan
A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till ri d'mhacan
Gheibh thu 'n gadan bhreac a-nochd.

Mo sheanchab liath ri d'bheul beag maoth
Ri d'bheul beag maoth, ri d'bheul beag maoth
Mo sheanchab liath ri d'bheul beag maoth
Ri d'bheul beag maoth 's mi seinn port dut.

Dearest Mor, come back to your son
You will get a stringful of trout tonight.

My ancient gory gob against your gentle mouth
As I sing a tune for you.

From Rev. Norman MacDonald, Skye.

F57.10 *Song of the Water-Horse*

The song of the water horse when his wife fled from him. It is added out there that his heart broke and his … died.

Mhòr a ghaoil Mhòr a sliàgh [shàgh?]
Mhòr a ghaoil till gu d mhacan
S gheibh tha n bradan breac on lochan
Tha n oidhche nochd
gu fliuch foasach

aig mu mac sa
air sgath crocan
gun teinne gun tuar
gun fhasgadh
's tu sior chomhràn

Campbell Mss 50.2.4: f. 261s (cf. note on f. 258: October 1871 – Dunvegan. Lent by Miss MacLeod a Mss made this year in Uist by miss Tolmie, now living at Odhar. She was at work in North Uist. Speaks Gaelic as a native, writes it well and writes music).

F57.11 *Waterhorse lullaby*

A Mhòr, a Mhòr,
A Mhòr, a Mhòr,
Till gu do mhacan,
Till gu do mhacan
'S gheibh thu bacan bhreac a-nochd bhuam.

Tha 'n oidhche fuar,
Tha 'n oidhche fuar
Aig Beinn T/Shorcain,
Gun teine gun tuar
Ach na flodain
Aig taobh cnocain,
'S e dol as oirnn

Mor, Mor,
Mor, Mor,
Come back to your little son,
Come back to your little son,
And you will get a few trout from me to-night.

The night is cold,
The night is cold
At the hill of Torcan [Sorcan?]
With no fire or comfort
Except for flodain [?]
Beside a hillock
and it going out on us

From the Rev. William Matheson, North Uist and Edinburgh.

F57.12 *Will you not waken Fionn?*

Cùl buidhe, cùl bàn (3)	*Yellow hair, blonde hair*
Nach dùisg thu fionn? (?) (3)	*Will you not waken Fionn?*
Tha toirm san loch (2)	*There is a noise in the loch*
Nach tilg thu clach (2)	*Will you not throw a stone?*
Nach buain thu ploc (2)	*Will you not dig up a sod?*

A Mhòr, a Mhòr,	*Mor, Mor,*
A Mhòr, a Mhòr	*Mor, Mor,*
Seall ri do mhacan (3)	*Attend to your son,*
'S gheibh thu bacan breac a-nochd bhuam.	*And you will get a speckled band/string of beads from me tonight.*

The rest is a variety of repetitions of the above.

F57.13 *The kelpie's song*
A Mhòr, a Mhòr,
A Mhòr, a Mhòr,
Till ri d'mhacan
Seall ri d'mhacan
Gheibh thu bagaid buaidheach breac leat
'S am ba-u à.

Agus bha ise teicheadh, ach bha i faicinn an leanabh. Chan eil cuimhn' agam air a' chòrr. Cha robh mis' ach beag.
Woman: Gheibheadh tu fìon.
Inf.: U?
Woman: Gheibheadh tu fìon

Gheibheadh tu fìon
Gheibheadh tu fìon
Gach nì b'ait leat
Gach nì b'ait leat
Ach nach èirinn anns a' (1) mhadainn
Ach nach èirinn leat sa (2) mhadainn.
'S am ba-u à
(all sung twice)

Bha 'n-sin pòsaidh air choireigin aca ach theich ise. Fhuair ise teiche.

Translation
Mòr, Mòr, Mòr, Mòr, Come back to your little son, Attend to your little son.
You'll get a lovely speckled cluster (to take away) with you.
Sam ba-oo ah.

And she was escaping, but she was seeing the child. I do not remember any more. I was only little.
Woman: You would get wine.
Inf: Eh?
Woman: You would get wine.

You would get wine, everything you would like, but that I would not arise (1) with you (2) in the morning.
Then they had some sort of marriage, but she escaped. She managed to escape.

F58. Waterhorse as Young Man Meets Girl; Rests his Head on her Lap/Asks her to Comb his Hair; she Realises what he is and Runs Away

A – SHE IS SAFE

F58.A.1 *The water-horse and the girl*

[Summary] Refers to the theme of a water-horse in the shape of a young man who sits with a girl and falls asleep in her lap, and she has scissors.

SA1953.101.A8 (from Neil MacPherson, Mull; recorded by C. I. MacLean)

F58.A.2 *Each-uisge in Loch Sniosdal*

Loch Sniosdal is a repellent-looking loch, lying in a hollow west of Quiraing, on which the sun seldom shines.

When and where the belief in the each-uisge's existence prevailed, the superstitious could hardly fail to associate this gloomy loch with the monster's abode. The each-uisge of Loch Sniosdal frequently appeared as a fascinating gentleman, dressed in immaculate black, with white linen front. A woman, herding on a sheiling, once met him in that guise. They sat down, and he nestled his head on her lap. While stroking his head with her hand, she felt grains of sand in his coal-black hair. She at once knew who it was. Though terror-stricken she remained calm, and showed no signs of fear. After a time her companion fell sound asleep. She then slipped quietly away, and was well on her way to safety before he discovered her absence. The poor woman heard his infuriated neighing behind her, but succeeded in reaching the nearest house, more dead than alive. It was said that the people of hamlets, two miles away, could hear his enraged roaring.

MacKenzie 1930: 47.

F58.A.3 *Water horse in Skye*

A native of the parish of Sleat in the island of Skye says that she often heard people talk of water horses having been seen in the fresh water lochs in her native place. She said:

I heard of one that came into a house one time in the form of a man. I cannot remember what word it said when it came in, but they said there was nobody in the house at the time but the woman of the house, and it put its head in her bosom, and caught her hair with its two hands, and was going to hold her by the hair of her head, but she clipped her hair, and left it with him, and running out, got clear of him.

Maclagan Mss:7680-7681 (from Mrs Henderson, Oban).

F58.A.4 *Variant of Water horse in Skye*

A Coll man has related what is evidently a variant of the above Sleat version. His is as follows:

There were plenty of water horses in the fresh water lochs in Skye. There was at one time a woman there who was living alone, and one day an each uisge came in in the form of a man, and said something to her. He laid his head on her knees, and took a hold of her hair with its two hands. She suspected that he was not a right man, but kept quiet till he fell asleep, and then she clipped her hair, and slipped clear of him, and ran, and ran, and so got quit of him.

Maclagan Mss:7681 (from Archibald McLean, Oban).

F58.A.5 *Water horse in Loch Frisa*

The reciter is an old man over eighty, and a native of the south end of the island of Mull. He said:

The water horse that was in Loch Frisa used to change sometimes into the shape of a man. One time it did that, and it came up to a woman that was sitting a little distance from the edge of the loch. It spoke to her, and sat down beside her. She did not notice at first, but after a while, the man, as she thought he was, said he was wearied, and lay down, and put his head in her lap. She then noticed sand, and things among his hair, and she began to suspect that he was not a right man. She got a great fright, but managed to keep quiet. As fortune would have it, she happened to have a pair of scissors with her, and she quietly clipped away the part of the apron, and petticoats on which his head was lying, and slipping herself clear of him, she made off, and when she looked after her, she saw that he had again changed back to a horse, and he went into the loch.

Maclagan Mss:7683 (from Malcolm Macgillivray, Tobermory).

F58.A.6 *Ma 's duine 'tha 'n seo...*

The water-horse came in the shape of a young man (*riochd fleasgaich*) out of his native element, and sat down beside a girl who was herding cattle on the banks of the loch. After some pleasant conversation he laid his head in her lap, in a fashion not unusual in old times, and fell asleep. She began to examine his head, and to her alarm found that his hair was full of sand and mud. She at once knew that it was none other than the 'Each-Uisge', who would certainly conclude his attentions by carrying her on his back into the depths of the loch. She accordingly proceeded as dexterously as she could to get rid of her skirt, leaving it under the head of the monster. No sooner did he awaken that he jumped up and shook the skirt, crying out several times 'Ma's duine tha'n so's aotram e, mu'n dubhairt an-t-Each-Uisge' ('If this be human it's light, as the water-horse said'), then rushed down the brae and plunged into the lake. The girl's brother met the creature the next morning at the same spot, and after a severe hand-to-hand fight killed it with his sword.

The scene of the above legend is a little knoll on the island of Lewis, which bears the name of 'Cnoc-na-bèist', the hillock of the monster. It lies on the border of a fresh-water loch named 'Loch-à-Mhuileinn', the loch of the mill. Its ancient Norse name was 'Loch-brae-vat', i.e. the beautiful water.

MacPhail 1896: 400.

Compare with Nicolson 1951: 306.

'Ma 's duine 'tha 'n seo, 's aotrom e, mu'n dubhairt an t-each-uisge – If this be human, it's light, as the water-horse said'.

The story is that the water-horse came in the shape of a young man (*riochd fleasgaich*) out of his native element, and sat down beside a girl who was herding cattle on the banks of the loch. After some pleasant conversation, he laid his head in her lap, in a fashion not unusual in old times, and fell asleep. She began to examine his head, and to her alarm, found that his hair was full of sand and mud. She at once knew that it was none other than the 'Each-Uisge', who would certainly conclude his attentions by carrying her on his back into the depths of the loch. She accordingly proceeded, as dexterously as she could, to get rid of her skirt, leaving it under the

head of the monster. No sooner did he awaken than he jumped up and shook the skirt, crying out several times, 'Ma 's duine 'tha 'n seo,' etc., then rushed down the brae, and plunged into the lake.

F58.A.7 *The stranger of Lochasspool*

The reciter says that she remembers hearing people, when she was young, speaking of a water horse which they said was in Lochasspool, near Bunessan in the Ross of Mull. The loch is quite near where she was brought up. There was one story she says that was often rehearsed. This is it:

One sabbath day the people of the place were all gathered out, sitting on a little hill that was there – that was their habit at the time – and a fine looking man came and sat down among them, beside a woman. None of them knew him, but the woman beside whom he sat began to smooth his head, and saw that there was some of that green grass in it that grows on stones that are under the water. He turned into a horse and went away into the loch, but I do not remember whether they said anything about his taking the woman away along with him.

Maclagan Mss: 7683-7684 (from Mrs Malcolm Macgillivray, Tobermory).

F58.A.8 *The fair hair water horse*

A native of the parish of Applecross said:

Many a time I heard of water horses. People used to say they were in some of the lochs in our place. I remember a story I often heard about a girl that had a sweetheart. He would be meeting her every night. He had long fair hair, and one night when they met he gave her a comb and asked her to comb his hair, and when she did so, he turned into a horse, and she got a terrible fright.

Maclagan Mss: 7909 (from Jessie Macdonald, Applecross).

F58A.9 *Woman near Loch Liatach*

The reciter's views regarding the water horse are here reproduced as nearly as possible in his own words. He said:

I have often heard of water horses, but I don't know whether there is such a thing in it, but the picture of them is in books, and you would think some body must have seen them before the picture could be put in a book. At any rate, there was a story about one that was in Loch Liatach. One time a woman was sitting outside at the wall of her house (*tot an tighe*). Her house was not far from the loch, and a man whom she did not know came forward, and sat down beside her. She thought there was something suspicious looking about him, and wanted to get away from him, but thought it safer to act cautiously, so she worked slowly, and bit by bit, till she got herself free, but just as she got up to escape, he changed into the appearance of a horse, and ran down into the loch, and was out of her sight in no time.

Maclagan Mss: 8118-8119 (from Mr Maclean, Criochan, Barra).

F58.A.10 *Each-uisge in loch near Scuir*

In Eigg the 'each-uisge' dwells in a small, deep loch near the Scuir. It often appears in the form of a handsome young man, and has more than once succeeded in carrying off a young woman. On one occasion he appeared as a strapping young fellow with golden hair and met 'Nighean Fear Ghrùdhlainn' near the Scuir. They sat down and chatted away for a while, but the sun was hot, and by-and-by the young

man fell asleep with his head resting on the girl's knee. While he was asleep the girl had time to notice that his hair was full of sand, and that he had the queerest feet she had ever seen. Then it dawned upon her that she was being tricked, and that her companion was no other than the 'each-uisge'. She wished to get away, but he had her long, black hair so firmly gripped in his hand that she could not. She sat in a cold agony, unable to move, feeling that her end was near, and thinking of the terrible stories she had heard of young women similarly entrapped and carried off, and whose lungs and heart were afterwards found floating on the loch, indicating all too surely what their fate had been. She did not faint, however, nor cry out – Highland girls are made of better stuff – but considered how she could get away without disturbing the slumbers of her now much detested companion. Suddenly her eyes fell upon a very sharp stone and, gently reaching for it, she patiently cut her hair free from his grasp, cautiously raised his head from her knee and escaped.

Watson 1908-1909: 52.

F58.A.11 *The Water Horse in South Uist*

DAM: Have you ever heard anything else about the water-horse, how many creatures there were, or anything like that, or anything else?

DAMcE: No I haven't, except I heard in South Uist that the water-horse was seen, only in the shape of a man.

DAM: Oh yes. How was that?

DAMcE: It was a woman on the shielings who saw him. She was out doing the summer herding. And she was spending the evening, it seems, knitting by the side of a loch. And she noticed a man as comely and handsome as ever she'd seen coming up toward her. He sat beside her and he put his head in her lap on top of her knitting. And when she looked at his hair she noticed seaweed from the loch in his hair. And she realised that this was not the proper thing at all. And it seems she took some scissors that she had and cut the space of his head out of the knitting, and she left him there. It was at the loch that he woke up when she was making for the banks of the glen or the face of the mountain where the shieling was situated.

DAM: And was he still a man?

DAMcE: He was a man coming out of the loch.

DAM: And do you remember from whom you heard this?

DAMcE: I heard it from one or two. I heard it from an old man in Stoneybridge.

SA1964.55.A2 (from D. A. MacEachan, Benbecula; interviewed by D. A. MacDonald).

F58.A.12 *The water-horse of Camus Fhionnairidh*

Well there was once in Camus Fhionnairidh a crofter living on his own in a lonesome glen and he had a house-keeper. They were three miles from the first ... from the nearest people. On this day the crofter went out to gather the peat. He was to be out all day. The house-keeper stayed in and she performed her usual work. Well, when she took her dinner, she sat down beside the window and she saw the big tall man there in black clothing coming in toward the door. She rose and let him in and he came in and she bade him sit at the table.

He said to her: 'Woman, would you be so good as to cut my hair, because it grows very long on me.'

'I'll do that', she said, as she rose and took hold of some scissors and a comb, but as she turned she noticed that he had very strange feet, that he had shoes unlike what other men have, more like hooves. But she went to get the scissors and the comb and she sat down. She bade him lay his head on her lap or her knee and she began to comb and prepare his hair and was going to cut it. She noticed that there was a lot of sand and bits of fish and other strange things among the roots of his hair, but she paid no heed of it and began to cut the hair and he seemed to enjoy it immensely. She proceeded to stroke his hair and began to suspect that this was not a normal man. She stroked his head and she combed and cut his hair. She then began to sing a soothing little song ... (recording fades out). She noticed that his head was bent over her knee and he made a grip with his teeth on the apron that was loose around her. And she didn't (let anything on them?) but began to make up her mind how she would trick him, and so she soothed him with little lullabies and strokings until at last he had fallen asleep.

The first thing she did then was to get the scissors quietly and she cut four circuits around the grip he had in his mouth and he fell down softly onto the place where she had sat, and she got up, and at the same time the crofter came in through the back door that they had, and when (the strange man) understood what was going on, he leapt out and made straight for the sea, and he leapt into the water and turned into a big black horse, and swam away to Loch Sgabhaig.

SA1953.185.2 (from Mrs. Kate MacKinnon, Kilmuir, Skye; recorded by J. MacInnes).

F58.A.13 *Naidheachd Mu'n Each-Uisge*

[Summary] Herdswoman sitting by loch, sewing. Handsome man came, put head in her lap to sleep. She could see seaweed/sand in his hair. She cut her apron where his head lay and ran off. Heard noise coming after her and saw a great horse, but she reached home safely. Thinks she heard this on the radio.

SA1974.53.A7 (Mairi MacKay, Stilligarry; no fieldworker name).

F58.A.14 *The protective charm*

[Summary] Three fairy knolls with lochs nearby. Water horse often came ashore from them. Girl sitting by loch approached by beautiful man who lay his head in her apron. Saw sand in his hair as she ran her fingers through it, and realised he was a water horse. She removed her apron as he slept, and ran away. He chased her in the form of a water horse. She protected herself with a charm, and escaped.

SA1972.223.B5 (from George MacKenzie, Sutherland; recorded by D. A. MacDonald and I. Fraser).

F58.A.15 *Shieling in Bearnasdale, Skye*

[Summary] Girl left alone by others at shieling in Bearnasdale, Skye. A handsome man comes and puts his head on her lap. When she sees the sand in his hair she takes fright and cuts away her own clothes around the hair of the man with scissors she had been using for seming. She runs home.

SA1955.138.2 (from Mrs Kate Beaton, Portree, Skye; recorded by J. MacInnes).

F58.A.16 *Waterhorse of Raasay*

[Summary] Woman in Comhnardan, Brogs, Skye, sits by loch-side. Water-horse (each-uisge) comes from loch and lies down beside her and becomes a man. Asks her to comb his hair. His head is full of sand. He falls asleep. She cuts part of her clothes as he is lying on them and escapes home. Neighing heard by side of loch.

IFC Mss 1026: 253-254 (from Angus Nicolson; collected by C. I. Maclean).

B – He Comes Back and Carries her Off into Loch

F58.B.1 *Girl taken by water horse*

Another Mull legend tells of a young damsel, on a warm summer evening straying along the banks of Loch Assapol, when a stranger accosted her. Together they sat on a green knoll, and the stranger laid his head in her lap. She carelessly ran her fingers through his hair, and discovering in it the green fungi of the loch, she trembled with fear, and looked about for escape. To her great relief he gave a loud snore, showing he was asleep. Adroitly placing a stone under his head, she sprang to her feet and with all possible speed ran to the old manse where she served. Arriving within a few yards of the door, she looked backward and saw a beautiful grey steed in full pursuit of her. It was the dreaded water-horse, who, finding that the maiden had escaped, followed her crying out, 'Next Sabbath I will come and take you.' The girl widely spread the account of her escape from the water-horse. The following Sabbath a great congregation assembled on the knoll immediately about the loch. The old parish minister stood in the center, with the girl also placed there for safety. In a little while a loud neighing was heard in the direction of the green plain skirting the margin of the lake, and at once appeared a water-horse coming at full gallop, with foaming mouth and distended nostrils. It charged into the crowd, seized the terrified girl in its jaws, carried her into the lake, and she was never seen again.

Maclean 1923: 163.

F58.B.2 *Water horse in Uist*

Mrs MacKinnon tells of a girl she heard of in Uist; who was at one time hearding near a loch there, and having fallen asleep, when she awoke she found a man lying beside her, who requested her to look his head, at the same time laying it down in her lap, and taking hold of part of her skirt in his mouth. She was afraid to move and began to finger his head, in which she found sand and seaware. At last he fell asleep, and she quietly took a pair of scissors from her pocket, and having clipped the piece of her skirt that was in his mouth right away, she made her escape, and ran home. It was sabbath, and all the men were at church, but there were some of the women standing outside talking, to whom she told about the fright she had got. Just while she was telling them of it, they saw a horse coming down, galloping as hard as it could. In a moment it lifted the girl from among them, and carried her away before their eyes, and she was never seen after that.

Maclagan Mss: 5098-5099.

F58.B.3 *Loch Nighean Dhughaill*

Loch Nighean Dhughaill, in the Scuirr Hills [Eigg], received its name from a maiden who perished there. She was herding in the hill one day, and saw a handsome youth – fleasgach briagh – who came and joined her. After some conversation, he laid his head on her lap, and having asked if she would clean his hair – am faisg thu

mo cheann dhomh – he went to sleep. While turning over his hair, she noticed some leaves of fresh-water plants, and perceived that her companion was the dreaded water-horse. Keeping her presence of mind, however, she contrived, without rousing him, to get his head off her lap, and having cut out her dress with her scissors the piece which was grasped in his hand, she fled with her utmost speed and reached home safely, but not before she heard an angry voice behind her declare that he would have her yet. Not long after, the whole population of Grùlain, as the township which then existed on the south side of the Scuirr was called, were spending the Sunday afternoon, according to custom, chatting together on the top of a hillock, when the water-horse suddenly appeared in their midst, and, seizing Nighean Dhughaill, carried her off before their eyes. The men, with a cry of rage, hastily seized some weapons and started in pursuit. They searched for her everywhere, but never saw her again. A bit of her dress and her lungs – sgaman – which were seen floating on the surface, made it only to plain that she had met a dreadful end in what has since been called Loch Nighean Dhughaill.

Robertson 1898: 203-204.

F58.B.4 *Lochan Nighean Dùghaill*

Young people sitting on a hillock in Grulin on a lovely summer evening; they are joined by a handsome young man who came from the shore and runs off with one of the girls. The others give chase over the hill, but he turns into a water horse and takes the girl with him into small dark loch, called ever since Lochan Nighean Dùghaill.

SA1964.12.B2 (Hugh MacKinnon, Cleadale, Eigg; recorded by D. A. MacDonald).

F58.B.5 *Girl from Baile Thangasdale taken*

I heard of some girls that were sitting on sabbath day at the outside of a house in Baile Thangasdale, and a man whom none of them knew came forward, and sat down beside a girl that was in the company, and laid his head on her knees. The other girls fled into the house, leaving her there, and she noticed something in his head like the weeds that grow in lochs. She happened to have a pair of scissors in her pocket, and she cut away the part of her petticoat on which his head lay, and leaving him there, she made her escape into the house, and in a little while he went away.

But on the next sabbath after that, the same girls were sitting outside where they had been sitting the sabbath before, and this time he came on them in the shape of a horse, and having caught this girl, he carried her away into the loch, and they never saw anything more of her, except pieces of her liver and heart that came ashore.

Maclagan Mss: 8119 (from Mrs Maclean, Leàdag, Barra).

F58.B.6 *Lochan Nighean Dughaill*

[Summary] Loch in Eigg called 'Lochan Nighean Dughaill'.Girls on hill one Sunday evening are approached by very handsome youth who takes the prettiest girl by the hand and makes for the hill with her. He carries her. Men watching follow him. Near a small lochan he becomes a horse. Springs into loch and brings girl with him. Days later parts of her body and clothing come to surface. Loch called Lochan Nighean Dughaill.

IFC Mss 1027: 6.3.1946 (from Hugh MacKinnon; collected by C. I. Maclean)

F58.B.7 *Lochan Nighean Dughaill*

People of Grulin sitting on hill one fine Sunday. A handsome stranger comes and sits beside girl in company. He takes girl away and ascends the cliffs above village. Party of boys follow to small loch at top of cliffs. No sign of stranger and girl. Boys search by banks of loch. Girl's liver and lungs found by loch-side. Loch called 'Lochan Nighean Dughaill'.

IFC Mss 1028: 15 (from D. A. MacQuarrie; collected by C. I. Maclean).

F58.B.8 *Water horse loch*

A young girl was in the hill one day looking for the cattle, near Water-horse-loch, and a fine handsome lad met her, and he asked her what was she seeking, and she said that she was (seeking) the cattle. He said, her to come and scratch his head for a while, and that she would get the cattle again. She went away and she sat down, and he sat beside her, and he put his head on her knee, and he caught some of her clothes. As soon as she had begun to scratch his head, she felt blades of grass, such as will be growing in lochs, and she took fright. Fortunately, it happened that she had a pair of scissors in her pocket, and she cut away the piece of her clothes of which he had a hold, and she escaped, leaving him there.

But a little while after that, it happened on a sabbath that the girls of that township were sitting outside at the house wall, and this girl along with them, and who came upon them but this same lad, and the girl knew him as soon as she saw him. She almost lost her reason with the fright, and she requested the others to hide her, and they sat on her top. The lad came and he lay down among them, and he began to tickle the soles of their feet, and they fled into the house, and the girl was left. Then the lad lifted her on his back, and away he went to the loch. The cry went out, and the girl's father and mother ran after her, but they were not able to keep in view of her, and when they reached the side of the loch, they found her heart and liver, but the remainder of her was never seen by any living man.

Maclagan Mss: 8121 (from Alexander Campbell, Eoligary, Barra).

F58.B.9 *Water horse in Applecross*

The reciter belongs to the parish of Applecross, and says that she often heard of water horses being seen in lochs in her native place. She related the following story, which she said she often heard told:

There was one time a girl, and often when she would be going for peats or for the cows a man was meeting her. He was decent looking, and always spoke to her, and she would speak to him. She did not know who he was, or where he was from, but as they met so often, and as he always spoke to her, she, from less to more, began to look on him as a kind of lad of hers, and she was always glad when he met her, and she thought that he too was gald. This went on for a while, until one day she and a neighbour's wife were going together to the moss for peats, who met them but this man. He was dressed in grey clothes, and as usual, he spoke to the girl, and she spoke to him, but as the other woman was along with her, she did not stop. When they reached the peats, they laid down their creels, and sat down to rest. They were no time there when the man with the grey clothes came up to them, and sitting down beside them, laid his head on the girl's knee, and in a little while he fell asleep. The girl looked at his feet, and noticed that it was horse's feet he had, and she gave a sign to her companion. They then knew that he was not a man at all, but a water horse that

had gone into the shape of a man, and they were terribly afraid. The married woman, who happened to be in the family way at the time got up, and made for home by a short cut, but that road was very rough. The girl managed, somehow, to slip away from under his head without wakening him, and she made for home by the longer road. But they had not got far when the each uisge awoke, and after them it went, as hard as it could run. It happened to take the short cut, thinking they had both gone that way. When the woman had come to a place where the sea came in at the foot of a high rock that was there, she found that she could not get past it, and so she hid behind the rock, but when the each uisge came up, it found her, and killed her there. But the girl got safe home.

Maclagan Mss: 7687-7688 (from Bessie McRae, Applecross).

F58.B.10 *Water horse in Glen Kildonan*

There was once a young girl in the world who lived in Uist, and she would always go to the hills in the summer with the cattle and oft-times return home ... Her father would go out with the cattle and stay out to tend them all day, and come back with them in the evening. Now this girl was out in Glen Kildonan with the cattle, and she sat tending them and knitting stockings at the same time. What did she see coming up the hill towards her but a beautiful young boy, and he made straight for her. They began to talk and tell stories, and people believe that the girl fell in love with the boy. Anyway, each day from then on, the girl would go out to Glen Kildonan with the cattle the young boy would meet her, and they would be together while she was out until she returned home in the evening. It was known well enough that this boy was meeting the girl, but they figured that he was only a local lad out in the hills fishing trout or some such thing.

But this day, the girl was out with the cattle in the glen, and the young boy came as was his habit, and when they had spent a while together, he complained that he was tired and asked if he may rest his head on her lap and sleep. This he did, and he slept. When he had slept a while, what did the girl notice but seaweed tangled in his hair, and she was struck with fright. She remembered hearing tales of the water-horse, and how it would often be in the shape of a man. The boy was still asleep with his head in her lap, and she had no way of escape. But this is what she did. She began to gingerly open the apron she had on top of the rest of her clothing, and at the same time removed herself from it and left it for the boy's pillow as he slept, and she dashed as fast as she could to town. He awoke, and he missed her and went after her but did not catch her. When she reached the house she told what had occurred, and her brothers went out to fetch the cattle, but they saw no sign of anyone.

There was nothing more of this story than itself, at least, except for some time later. Many young people were gathering at the house of the girl, along with the boy ... It was Sunday evening, and she was amongst the others sitting against the outside wall of the house. They saw this handsome young man approaching the house, but no one thought it important. But the man made straight for the girl sitting by the wall and took her with him. When the others saw what had happened, they went after them but they were too far away. They saw nothing more of the girl or the boy. They later found the clothes of the girl by the side of the loch in the hills, the very same clothes she wore when the other one took her away. But she was never seen again.

D. J. MacDonald Mss vol 11: 1018-1022.

F58.B.11 *The maiden and the stranger*

A young woman, who was being described as being extremely beautiful, the daughter of a shepherd at Gruline, was one day returning home from the hill-moor to which she had gone on some errand of her father's, when she was met by a stranger who entered into converstion with her. He had long flowing hair, and on the whole was goodly to look upon. So confidential did the pair become that they sat down, and soon she was engaged in running her fingers through his hair. At last the stranger fell asleep. The seemed to arouse the girl, for she stood up to resume her way home. She discovered, however, that the sleeping man had caught her dress in his hand and was holding her tight. There was nothing for it but to cut away the part, and this having been done she sped away home. That evening, as all the family were sitting round the fire, the stranger appeared, seized the maiden, and after carrying her up the mountain-side, disappeared with her in the darkest and deepest loch on the hill-top.

Calder Ross 1889: 66-67.

F58.B.12 *Each-uisge abducts girl*

– Did you hear about fairies, about the fallen angel?

– Did you hear about the, about the, was it the man that came ashore; and this girl allowed him, what was it, to look in her hair, or I forget what it was, and he had turned out to be an each-uisge.

– Oh each-uisge.

– Ran away with her into the sea... I forget where the place was... One of the old stories I heard from the old people.

– Yes, yes.

– But I could hardly grasp them all.

SA 1954.56.B8 (from Donald MacEachan, Arisaig; recorded by C. MacLean)

F58.B.13 *Water-horse on Eilan Pladda*

A black-smith called Gobha mòr had two daughters. One time the girls were at the shieling with their father's cows. The shieling was situated by a loch. One day, a big handsome dark complexioned man came to the girls, and sitting down besides one of them, laid himself down on her lap and asked her to feel his head. When she put her hand on his head she was startled for it felt so cold and full of sand. She then knew he was not a right man. She told her sister to run home as fast as she could to get help, 'and never mind what may happen to me'. The girl ran home to get their father, and they hurried back to the shieling, where they found the girl dead, for the man was not a man at all, but a water-horse in the shape of a man. The Gobha Mòr decided to avenge his daughter's death. He went and built a house at the edge of the loch, and made a large ditch, which led in from the loch under the house, and he made another ditch round about it. When everything was ready he took the coulter of the plough, and blessed it, and put it in the fire. By and by the water-horse came in, in the shape of a great big handsome-looking man, and the Gobha Mòr gave him a seat to sit on. In a short time the brute pretended that he was asleep, and lying back with his mouth wide open, the Gobha Mòr caught the red-hot coulter, and pushed it down the beast's throat, and killed it, and that was its end. And the Gobha Mòr got great praise for what he had done.

Maclagan Mss: 9052 (from M. Kennedy, Slumbaigh, Lochcarron).

F58.B.14 *The water-horse of Raasay*

There was once upon a time a certain smith in Raasay. And as it so happened, the people of the household themselves acted as herdsmen. But one night, his daughter, who had been looking for the sheep, did not come home, and they went out next day to search for her. There was a loch in the high ground of Raasay where the water-horse used to live; when they came to it, they found the heart and lungs of the girl on the shore of the loch. The smith was deeply distressed, and in his own mind he determined he would find a way to kill the water-horse. He and his lad began building a smithy by the side of the loch, and when they had made the smithy ready, the smith and his lad went there during the night. The lad took a wether with him, and put it on a spit to roast it. In the fire he had great hooks, red-hot, and ready should anything come that way. The door of the smithy faced the loch, and they saw the loch becoming a blaze of vapour; and the smith said, 'If anything comes upon us, be a man!' Then they saw coming in at the outer door what seemed to be a year-old horse, shaggy and ugly. The big smith and his lad fixed the two hooks in him red-hot out of the fire: the water-horse began to yell and tried to escape, and dragged them near the door. The big smith dug his heels in and dragged him back to the door again, and there they held him. The smith ordered the boy to go and fetch out the great hook from the fire and thrust it into the water-horse, and the boy did so. And they held him there until they killed him. But when day came there was nothing there but a heap of what looked like star slime.

McKay 1960: 13 [Campbell Mss vol. 10, no. 64]

F58.B.15 *The Water-Horse*

A girl was tending the cattle by the side of a loch. A dapper young man approached her. He laid his head on her coat and he slept. She peered closely at his hair and saw moss and little loch fish. She recognised that it was the water-horse. She cut the piece of her coat that was underneath his head and she ran. When the water-horse awoke, he grabbed the piece of clothing under his head and he shook it yelling. 'If someone did this it was in jest. If someone did this it was in jest'. Hence the proverb.

He fell after the girl. He came close to catching hold of her before she reached her father's house. She was very frightened and she died soon afterwards

Her brother went out the day after the next – a horse with a sword, the water-horse met him and he killed him.

CW 5, ff. 25-25A. (cf. CW 108 – f. 42A[2])

F58.B.16 *The Water-Horse*

CW 108, f. 42 (A. Carmichael – same as CW 5 ff. 25-25A above).

F58.B.17 *The woman and her two suitors*

It was believed in Harris that the water horse could assume other shapes.

A lad was regularly visiting a young woman and continued his visits until by chance, he came to understand that she was being visited by some one else, whom he took to be a rival, and accordingly he ceased his attentions. The woman received the visits of the other, supposing him all the time to have been the object of her affection. At length she began to notice that his head had a peculiar sandy appearance, but she let an interview or two pass without saying anything. At last, she said, 'I cannot

understand your head: I can see nothing but sand on it. I do not know what kind of house you can be coming from.' 'I come from no house' was the reply. 'You thought I was ----, you will never be married to him, nor will you ever see me again. He left her, and looking after him, she saw him plunge into the sea, and disappear. She then knew that it was the water horse. In a short time afterwards she died.

MacLagan Mss: 303-303A (From Anne McLeod, domestic servant, a native of Bernera, Harris, living at T. C. Manse, Portcharlotte, Islay – written down by Elizabeth Kerr, The Manse, Portcharlotte, 6th Dec. 1893).

F58.B.18 *Water horse killed with red-hot iron on Raasay*

[Summary] Smith's daughter on shealing meets fine-looking man. They become friendly. He sleeps on her apron. She combs his hair and it is full of sand. She cuts apron and goes home. Water-horse finally captures her. Smith slaughters an ox, puts it in cave. Water-horse comes and eats and falls asleep. Smith kills water-horse with red-hot iron.

IFC Mss 1026: 314-315 (from Peggy Maclean; collected by C. I. Maclean).

C – Bull Let Loose to Fight Waterhorse

F58.C.1 *Tarbh na leòid*

There is an island a few miles west of Uist that they call Heisker and it's a low-lying island with little water. In summer, when the water was scarce, the women used to go out to do their washing in a loch some distance from the village. They went out two at a time, for it was said that a water-horse lived in this loch. It was also said by an old man in the place that it could happen that the water-horse would come to the village and that it might do fearful harm, and he advised the people to rear a bull and never to let it out of doors in case it might be needed some day.

But this year, anyway, whatever the reason, there was one woman who went out alone to do her washing. She finished her washing and she was tired and it was a fine warm evening and there was a sunny little knoll there and she lay down on the side of the knoll. When she had been there for a little while, she saw a fine-looking, handsome man approaching. He came right over to the place where the woman was and he said what a fine evening it was. She said it was indeed.

'You're pretty tired', said he, 'after all your washing'.

'Oh yes', said she.

'Ah, I'm pretty tired myself', said he. 'Would you have any objection', said he, 'if I sat beside you and took a rest?'

'Oh, I don't mind at all', said the woman.

He sat down beside her and when he had been sitting beside her for a while he said to her:

'I'm getting sleepy', said he. 'Would you have any objection', said he, 'if I laid my head in your lap?'

'Oh, I don't mind', said the woman.

The man laid his head in the woman's lap and when she had been looking at him for a while, she noticed that there was gravel from the loch among his hair, and water weeds. She looked at him more closely then and she suddenly noticed that he had hooves for feet and it was then that she realised who she had there – it was the water-horse.

He was fast asleep and snoring now, and she didn't know what on earth she should do. But she had a pair of scissors in her pocket and she took them out and cut a circle out of her coat where the water-horse's head was resting and she managed to slip away cautiously, but when she got a little way off she took to her heels.

She was getting near the village but it wasn't long till she heard a neighing behind her and looked back, and there was the water-horse coming, and coming pretty fast at that.

Apparently the man who was in charge with this bull that they were keeping in case the water-horse came, his name was MacLeod and the bull was called *Tarbh na Leòid*. When she was getting close to the village she began to shout:

'Turn loose *Tarbh na Leòid*!' she cried. 'Turn loose *Tarbh na Leòid*!'

Some people in the village heard the shouting and the bull was let loose and some others went out to meet the woman. The bull and the water-horse met and hurled themselves upon each other. Sometimes the water-horse seemed to be winning, and sometimes the bull seemed to be winning, but at last the bull started to drive the water-horse back and he drove him out into the sea at last and they both disappeared.

The woman went home and took to her bed and it is said that she never rose again.

But a long time after that a horn – one of the bull' horns was washed ashore, and it is said that it was used for a great many years as a bar across a gateway in Heisker, and it's not so very long ago since some people saw it – a little over ... just about forty years ago, it's said it was still to be seen in Heisker.

SA1956.159.3 (from Donald MacDougall, Malacleit, North Uist; recorded by D. A. MacDonald).

F58.C.2 *MacLeod's Bull*

There was once a woman in Uist who had a barn and she kept cattle. She was a MacLeod. And her cow bore a calf, a male calf. She began to ... [raise him] She gave every drop, most of the milk that the cow had, to the calf. She wouldn't let him out at any time and people began to wonder why she kept him, and they asked her, and she said ... She kept him from year to year until at last he had been hers for seven years. As a bull that had never been let out, he was an awfully big brute ... it seemed. But she and her sister were doing the washing, and a big strong man came up to them and began to tell them a story. They sat with him until at last he fell asleep, for he put his head on the lap of the woman. She suspected that he was not a common, natural man. She got a look at his hair and found that bits of sea-stuff were in it. And she signalled to her sister to go and say that the water-horse had come onto land, and she should let loose the bull. This was fine, and she went off at any rate and the woman tried as softly as she could to leave this man sleeping. She did that and she got ... [away] She wasn't long away when he woke, and what was this, but the water-horse had come onto land and going around spoiling things for people nearby. And she began to yell at her sister that she would have to let loose the bull ... The bull went his usual way past the woman ... he picked himself up, anyway, and he went for the water-horse, and the fight began ... [they were] in it together. The bull pushed the water-horse increasingly closer to the surface of the loch. He did that and the battle continued the whole day. The next day there was no sign of the water-horse or the bull, but they would sometimes find blood following water after that to the surface of the loch, and it was on the boards of their gate for a long time in Pheist, and we have never heard

anything since of the water-horse, nor has anyone seen the Bull of MacLeod after that day.

SA1950.18 (no ref.)

F58.C.3 *Tarbh heisgir agus an t-each uisge*

Bull was fed from birth on the milk of seven cows. Fights with monster [each uisge]. Informant knows only the outline of the story. It is still fairly well known in North Uist.

SA1963.7.B8 (from James Robertson, North Uist; recorded by D. A. MacDonald).

F58.C.4 *Tarbh na leoid*

[Summary] Renowned bull - Tarbh na Leoid. Water horse bothering cattle - itself and Tarbh na Leoid fought. They went into the sea - Tarbh na Leoid's corpse came ashore in Heisgeir. They kept its horns. Water horse not seen again.

SA1968.58.A3 (from Donald Ewen MacDonald, Balranald, North Uist; recorded by D. A. MacDonald, A. J. MacDonald).

F58.C.5 *The Water-Horse and the bull*

There was once an old woman in Heskair who would make predictions, and what did she do but foresee that the island would be ...[visited] by the water-horse. She said there was only one thing ...[to save] this island ... and what did they do but find a calf which had been ...[born] in Uist. She told them of this in conversation: you will be ... on a hill and you will see two crows coming and a bone in the beak ... of one of them. Later the children of Coinneach will be sitting on the hill and the bone will fall on one of them and he will get death the next day.

This is how it went. The woman died, and the prophecy was remembered by the people of the island. It was heard around here that a big calf was born in Uist. The old woman foretold that the calf would be fed for seven years by the milk of seven cows. They built an earthen house for the calf and it did not see the (land of its father?) for the seven years. Who was the girl but ... who was feeding it and it didn't see anyone else but itself.

It was said by the she-oracle that the horse – that it wouldn't be long before the water-horse came. The people of the island went to get the calf and they brought it home. It was seven years being fed, without seeing any man, woman, earth or its father but the girl who gave it its food as the she-oracle had ordained.

There were other small islands out around Heskair (Aoidh-sgeir) where the islanders' cattle would be on the beach. On a big beach ... between here and Heskair. Each family who tended cattle took a day in turn. On this particular day there was a girl of theirs and after she had sat a while by the straits keeping watch on the cattle of the island, what did she see but the most ... [handsome man] she had ever seen coming toward her. He came and sat next to her and he laid his head on her lap. His eyes were ... and what did he do but sleep. The girl took an interest and began to look closer at his head. What did she discover but ... and sand of the beach – she saw his legs and found that hooves were on them as they would be on a horse. She realised that the water-horse had come and she was terrorised. She had scissors in her pocket and she cut scraps from her coat and left them under his head. A few nights before this, the bull began to grow wild ... and the people understood that the water-horse was coming. The girl who was tending the cattle was terrorised and she fled home as

fast as her legs could go. The people of the island saw her coming and it wasn't long before they saw the water-horse as a monster after her. The girl began to yell for the bull to be let out. A handful of islanders ran up and took hold of the end of the earthen house and they ripped it apart. When the bull saw daylight, the beast went mad. There was a big pit below the house it was in, and there were a hundred feet below and a hundred feet above. It jumped down, it jumped up on the other side and it was the first thing to encounter the water-horse.

They began to fight ... They went seven ... from one side of the island to the other ... When they reached the sea the bull would go between the horse and the sea, and come back again ... On the last occasion they went out into the sea together. Everyone was watching and they saw them, until night fell, struggling with each other out at sea. A little while after this a few people were on the beach and what did they see but cloven hooves on the beach, and they thought they were the hooves of the water-horse. And after that, some other people found a horn on the beach, and they thought it was the horn of the bull.

CW 109, pp. 50-52. Manus MacNicol, Carbost, 28 Feb 1861 (a postman between Carbost and Sligeachan. He learned this story from a shepherd in Carbost).

F58.C.6 *Kelpie and bull in Islay*

In one of the islands here, on the side of the North (the name forgotten) there lived a great farmer before now, and he had a large stock of cattle. It happened one day that a calf was born amongst them, which an old woman who lived in the place ordered as soon as ever she saw it, to be put in a house by itself and kept there for seven years and fed on the milk of three cows. And as everything this old woman said was always done in the Baile, so also was this. But a long time after these things, a servant girl went with the farmer's herd of cattle to graze them beside a loch. And she sat down herself near the bank. There in a little while, what should she see walking towards her but a man (no description given of him) who asked her to 'fasg' his head. She said she was willing enough to do that. And so he laid his head down on her knee and she began to 'fasg' it for him. But soon she got a great fright. In growing among the man's hair, she saw a quantity of 'Liobhragach an Locha' (a certain green weed that grows in lochs and wells). However she knew if she screamed there was an end to her. So she kept her terror on herself, and worked away at this 'fasgadh' till the man fell fast asleep. The girl then untied her apron strings and slid her apron quietly to the ground with its burden on it. And she took her feet home as fast as she could. She was soon getting near the house, when she gave an eye behind her and saw her 'caraid' after her in the likeness of a horse. He had nearly reached her when the old woman called out to open the door of the Wild Bull's house. And in the minute out leaped the bull, he about whom she had given such strange orders when he was a calf. But now he was grown very big and strong. He gave an eye round him, and then at once he made off to meet the horse, and where they met, they fought. And they never stopped fighting till they threw each other out into the sea, no one knowing which of the two was the best. But the next day, the body of the bull was found lying on the shore all torn and spoiled. And the horse was never more seen at all.

Note: Lachlan MacAulay prefaced the preceding story by remarking 'it is perfectly true for I heard it myself from a lobster fisher, who heard it all from an old man who saw the whole affair'. A suggestion was made to Lachlan to substitute 'old

witch' for 'old woman' as being altogether more appropriate to the circumstances of the case. But no, he could not agree to that, saying 'Well I suppose she was a witch, but I did not hear it'.

Signed: Thomas Pattison, January 28, 1861.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff. 475a-476b.

Compare with the published version:

In one of the islands here (Islay), on the northern side, there lived before now a great farmer, and he had a large stock of cattle. It happened one day that a calf was born amongst them, and an old woman who lived in the place, as soon as ever she saw it, ordered that it should be put in a house by itself, and kept there for seven years, and fed on the milk of three cows. And as every thing which this old woman advised was always done in the 'baile', this also was done. (It is to be remarked that the progeny of the water-bull can be recognised by an expert by the shape of the ears.)

A long time after these things a servant girl went with the farmer's herd of cattle to graze them at the side of a loch, and she sat herself down near the bank. There, in a little while, what should she see walking towards her but a man (no description of him given in this version), who asked her to 'fàsg' his hair. She said she was willing enough to do him that service, and so he laid his head on her knee, and she began to arrange his locks, as Neapolitan damsels also do by their swains. But soon she got a fright, for, growing amongst the man's hair, she found a great quantity of 'Liobhagach an locha', a certain slimy green weed that abounds in such lochs, fresh, salt, and brackish. (In another version it was sand). The girl knew that if she screamed there was an end of her, so she kept her terror to herself, and worked away till the man fell asleep, as he was with his head on her knee. Then she untied her apron strings, and slid the apron quietly on to the ground with its burden upon it, and then she took her feet home as fast as it was in her heart. (This incident I have heard told in the Isle of Man and elsewhere, of a girl and a supernatural). Now when she was getting near the houses she gave a glance behind her, and there she saw her 'caraid' (friend) coming after her in the likeness of a horse.

He had nearly reached her, when the old woman who saw what was going on called out to open the door of the wild bull's house, and in a moment out sprang the bull.

He gave an eye all round about him, and then rushed off to meet the horse, and when they met they fought, and they never stopped fighting till they drove each other out into the sea, and no one could tell which of them was best. Next day the body of the bull was found on the shore all torn and spoilt, but the horse was never more seen at all.

The narrator prefaced this story by remarking that it was 'perfectly true', for he had it from a lobster fisher, who heard it from an old man who witnessed the whole scene.

Campbell 1860-1864, vol. 4: 303-306.

F58.C.7 *Tale of the Water Horse*

I will tell you a tale about a water horse. Heisgir was in two farms. It is eight miles west of Uist. There are houses in the very middle. It is three miles long and ¾ wide. Many people live there now. There was much dry sandy soil in the place and

they could rarely get water to wash clothes and water cattle. But at the East end there was a well that never dried. There went the daughter of MacLeod to wash and when she got to *togail na anairt* [?] lifting the linen. She sat on a hill to sew. Then she saw rising from the side of the well a great tall lad as if he had been asleep there. She took no notice supposing him to be a lad of the place or a stranger. He came up and he said it was a fine day and she said the same and that was not much. Then he laid his head in her lap and without much ado he asked her to try [?] his head. That she did and he slept. She said *tha gainbheach an agus liobhagach odhar na locha.* He had hold of her dress so she cut off the hold with her scissors and fled home. When she was a mile from the house she shouted *Fuas gal and devused agus leig a mach an tarbh* Loose the door and let out the bull. Nighean Mhic Leoid got up and let out the bull who sprang out and set off to meet the horse which was coming. He was gray with black spots on his side like a mackerell. Then they fought for more than four hours and no one knew which had the better. But at the end of a week, *slamhan* the core of the bull's horn and the liver and bladder of the horse came ashore. An old man told me that he has often seen the core of that bull's horn fastening a gate in Heisgeir. Tarbh Mhic Leoid – MacLeod's bull was fed from a great hollow stone that is there. He had ... stone weight of fresh warm milk every day for 73 years. I have seen that stone. It would be a good lift for a man. The dairy maid was a MacLeoid.

Note: Now that story I know well but not with all those names and localities.

Campbell Mss 50.2.4: ff. 62-63 (18th September, 1871).

F68. Children Carried off by the Waterhorse

A – ALL DROWN

F68.A.1 *Water-horse in Ardrishaig*

I don't believe in superstition myself but a class-mate of mine once told me a story about a waterhorse that I almost believed. She said her mother along with a band of other young children used to play with a lovely little pony, that lived on the shores of the loch [Lochead Lodge – Ardrishaig]. No one claimed this little beauty and do what they could he was not to be wiled away from the loch. He was of a glossy blueblack colour and seemed quite at ease with the arms of the little ones around its neck. The children, happening to tell their mothers that sand was in its hair, were forbidden to go near it. 'Stolen fruit is sweet' and this only intensified the pleasure the bairns derived from spending a while with 'wee pony'. Some of them one day managed to huddle together on its back. It galloped into the sea with them and the poor little things were drowned. Pony was never seen again.

Maclagan Mss: 178-178A.

F68.A.2 *Loch Sgamhan*

A Lochcarron woman gave Mairi Ruadh, one of the eldest women in the district, as her authority for the following:

One time some children were playing by the side of Loch-Sgamhan, and when they saw what they thought was a pretty horse, up a little bit from the edge of the loch, some of them got about it, and having got a hold of its tail, found they could not let it go again, and the horse dragged them after it to the loch, and they were lost there. The only remains of them that were ever found, were their hearts and livers. The heart and liver, it is said, are the last parts of a person to decompose. It was from this the loch got its name Loch-sgamhan (Loch liver).

Maclagan Mss: 9131.

F68.A.3 Loch in Poolewe

A lady who is a native of Wester Ross tells of a fresh water loch which she knows well, in Poolewe in which it is said there was a water horse at one time, and many are of opinion it is there still. There was a story, which was accepted for truth, about some children that were one day playing near the edge of the loch, and seeing a little horse a little bit away from where they were. They thought it was a right horse, and tried to catch it. Two of them put their hands on it, and the hands stuck, and they could not free themselves, until the horse had carried them into the loch, and they never were seen again. Men were brought from Glasgow to search the loch, and they tried to drain it, but after working for a long time they had to give it up, for they found that no matter how fast they would pump the water out, they never could get the loch dry. The water seemed to be coming in by some passage below the ground, and they had to have it, and so the loch is there still.

Maclagan Mss: 9198.

F68.A.4 *Water horse of Loch Venachoir*

Our guide informed us that the people of the vale had been a good deal alarmed by the appearance of that unaccountable being the water-horse (*Each Uisge*) during the spring, which had not been seen there since the catastrophe of Corlevrann, *the*

wood of woe, when he carried into the loch fifteen children who had broken Pace Sunday. I made enquiries concerning the habits of the animal, and was only able to learn that its colour was brown, that it could speak, and that its motion agitated the lake with prodigious waves, and that it only emerged in the hottest midday to be on the bank.

Leyden (ed. Sinton) 1903: 13-14.

F68.A.5 *Boy drowned in Loch-à-Ghille*

The reciter, who is a native of the parish of Creich, says there is a little fresh water loch near Ospisdale, where he was brought up, in which it is said a water horse used to be. There is a story told about two lads being near this loch at one time when they saw the water horse on the land. Nothing would do with one of them, but he must have a ride on the horse; so on he got on and away the horse went for the loch, and the lad could not get off. It seems when one gets on a water horse, he sticks to it, and cannot get off. And so in this case the horse carried him into the loch, and he never was seen again. From that the loch has got the name of Loch-à-ghille (the lad's loch).

Maclagan Mss: 7323 (from Mr Barclay, Swordale, parish of Creich).

F68.A.6 *Loch-à-ghille*

Another native gives a variant of this as follows:

There used to be a water horse in Loch-à-ghille, and I heard them telling of one time, on a sabbath day, a number of children were down about the loch when the water horse happened to be up on the land. Some one said that they should have a ride on the horse, and they were getting up on its back, one after another. As they were getting up, the horse was growing bigger, and bigger, and when they had all got on, away it went with them to the loch, and they were all lost, and never seen after that.

Maclagan Mss: 7323.

F68.A.7 *Loch Shin*

A native of Creich parish, in the County of Sutherland, speaking of the belief in the existence of the water horse, said:

I was working for some time at Loch Shin when the Duke was taking in the new land there, and many a time I heard the old people who belonged to that place, speaking of a water horse that used to be in the loch. They were saying that it was in it true enough. And I well believe it, for there were things of that kind in it long ago that are not in it now. And they said that one sabbath day there were some lads herding near the loch, and when they saw the horse grazing at the side of the loch, they thought it was another horse and some of them proposed that they should have a ride on it. It seems it allowed them to get on its back without stirring, and one after another got on until there were nine on it; and they said that somehow or other, every one that went on got room. But when the nine were up, away the horse went to the loch, and the lads could not get off, and the whole of them were lost, and never seen after that. That was told for a truth.

The marsh-marigold is sometimes called the shoe of the water horse (bròg an eich uisge).

Maclagan Mss: 7910 (from Hugh Urquhart, Bonar).

F68.A.8 *The green water horse*

There was a man in Ionar Gharaidh and he had to go and see the Knee-woman about one o' clock in the morning, and he had to get past the River Gharaidh, and as he crossed the river his horse got a fright, and what came up to his feet but a salmon as big as he'd ever seen. And he said to himself:'I never saw such a fish in Garaidh.'

And he crossed the river and he thanked God that he got ... by the trip he was undertaking.

His attention was drawn to a green meadow just ahead because he saw a green horse coming, one as beautiful as he had ever seen, and he kept on with his journey. And he found the Knee-woman, took her back and didn't mention a thing to anyone.

But six weeks afterwards, children were playing down by the river and there was one little girl, and the horse was so sleek and neat, and she went over and put her hand on it, and when she did so she couldn't take her hand back, and the horse fled with her to the river and she was drowned.

When the other children returned home they were asked where the other little girl was, and they said the horse stole away with her into the water.

It was then that the man told what he'd seen on his earlier trip, and they came to the decision that it was the water-horse who drowned the girl.

SA 1952.123.1 (John MacDonald, Spean Bridge; recorded by C. MacLean).

F68.A.9 *Each uisge in Loch Glassy*

In Cluny hill is Loch Glassy – a fairly large mountain tarn, out of which flows Cluny burn. It was inhabited, like Loch Derculich, by the 'Each Uisge' of Icelandic origin. On summer evenings it could be seen roaming at large on a green meadow adjacent to the tarn, and to all appearance a canny enough creature. One summer Sunday afternoon six Strathtay girls and a boy set out from their homes to inspect the 'Each Uisge'. They found him, patted him on the head and neck, and this kindness it apparently relished, for it lay on the sward and allowed them to sit on its back. The boy, who had a semi-bald scabbed head, stood at a distance and watched developments. He concluded that this animal was not the genuine horse it seemed to be, and thought that it grew considerably larger than it was at first. When the 'Each' had the six girls comfortably seated on its back it suddenly rose, plunged into the loch, and drowned the lot. The boy immediately took to his heels and the 'Each' after him, but fear enabled the boy to outstrip the horse, who would stop now and again in the pursuit and cry: – 'Fuirich mo ghille maol carrach! Fuirich mo ghille maol carrach!' – Stop, you bald scabbed headed boy. Ultimately the 'Each' gave up the chase and the boy, much frightened, got safely home and related all that happened on that eventful Sunday evening. The parents of the girls found parts of their bodies floating on the waters on the loch, and the name Loch Lassie was given to it, which it retains to this day!

Kennedy 1927: 36-37.

B – ONE ESCAPES

B1) by cutting off finger/hand

F68.B1.1 *The black steed of Loch Pityoulish*

...On a day when the heir of the Barony of Kincardine was playing with his young friends by the shore of Loch Pityoulish, their attention was drawn to a beautiful steed

grazing near at hand, harnessed with a silver saddle, silver bridle, silver reins. In great excitement all the boys grasped the reins, whereat the black steed galloped off into the loch, dragging them with him. Only the heir to the barony came home to tell the tale, since, as it happened, he was able to free himself by severing his rein-fast fingers with a knife he carried. Since that day the folks of Kincardine have been wary of the water-horse inhabiting the sunken crannog in Loch Pityoulish.'

MacGregor 1937: 72.

F68.B1.2 *Loch Pityoulish*

This loch, situated between the River Spey and the foothills of the Cairngorms, has an eerie reputation. It is said to harbour a water-horse, which, in defiance of the 'each uisge' tradition is black in colour. This animal is believed to inhabit a sunken 'crannog' or prehistoric lake-dwelling, the site of which at the bottom of the loch may be seen on calm days deepdown through the clear water.

According to local tradition, the black horse appeared one day many years ago to the young heir to the Barony of Kincardine as he played with other children by the side of the loch – as a coal-black steed decked out with a silver saddle, silver bridle and silver reins. The boys grasped the reins and mounted the horse, which galloped off with them to the loch, and only the young heir lived to tell of the encounter, as he alone had had the presence of mind to free his finger from the reins with a knife.

Robertson 1961: 135-136.

F68.B1.3 *Ardgay*

[Summary] Water-horse in loch used to come up on land and one Sunday evening several boys went for a ride on it. One boy was saved by having his finger cut off, but the others were stuck to the horse and carried into the loch. The water was red with their blood and livers.

Maclagan Mss (from Norman MacAndrew, Ardgay; this reference comes from the Folktale card index and did not have any page number. I was not able to locate it in the manuscript).

F68.B1.4 *Loch Migdale*

A Sutherland crofter, over seventy years of age, and intelligent, referring to belief in the existence of water horses, said:

There were plenty of water horses here at one time, but there are none now, whatever is the cause of it. There was one in Loch Migdale, they said, and it would be coming up on the grass at the side of the loch often. I heard them saying that one time, when it was ashore some boys saw it, and one of them said to his companions, 'isn't it like my father's horse?' And he got on its back, and soon found himself sticking to it so that he could not get off. And he would have been lost had he not managed to cut away his hand, which the horse carried away, but the boy himself escaped.

Maclagan Mss: 8054 (from William Chisholm, Migdale, Creich).

F68.B1.5 *The children's lake*

There is a loch seven miles from our house, [says Mr. Cathel Kerr, who told the story to the author], referring to the neighbourhood of Farr and Thurso, called Lochan-na-cloinne – the children's lake. It came to be so named because a number of

children were playing by its side on one Sunday, when a beautiful bay (*buidhe*) horse came out of the loch. The children went where it was and mounted on its back, all except one, who did not care about riding on it. He, however, put his finger on its shoulder, to feel the sleek pile of the horse, but he found that he could not take his finger away again; it stuck there! The horse began to move; the boy whipped out his knife and cut off the finger. And well was his need, for the next minute the horse rode, with the children on its back, right into the loch and disappeared. When, next day, the people came to the loch to search, all they could see was the internal parts (*sgamham*) of the children floating at the water's edge.

'Tales of the Water Kelpie', 1886-1887: 512-513.

F68.B1.6 *Loch Shin*

The reciter, who appears to be about fifty-six years of age, and has a strong leaning towards belief in the supernatural, is a native of the parish of Creich, in Sutherlandshire. Talking of water horses, she said:

I heard people who were up at Loch Shin saying that a water horse used to be seen there. One time, they said, it came up on a sabbath, and some boys went to have a ride on it. There were ten of them, and nine got on the horse's back, but when the tenth was going on, he noticed that his finger, with which he had touched the horse's back, stuck to it, and he tried to get it away but could not; and he was hanging by his finger by the horse's side, while the horse was making for the loch. Just when the horse had almost reached the water, this boy cried to the other boys that were on its back to cut his finger off, and some of them did that, and so he got safely away, all except his finger, which he never saw again. None of his companions could get off, and the horse plunged into the loch with every one of them sticking to it, and they were all drowned. They said that was quite true.

Maclagan Mss: 8054 (from Miss Mackay, Creich).

F68.B1.7 *Loch in parish of Rogart*

The reciter belongs to the Black Isle. About fifty-six years of age and strongly superstitious. He said about water-horses:

I heard my mother often telling about a water horse that was at one time in a loch in the parish of Rogart, and it would be coming up on the land sometimes. One sabbath evening it came out, and a lot of young lads who saw it proposed that they would have a ride on it. So away they went, and it appears it was quiet enough till they got on its back. They were saying there was twelve of them, and they all got on it except one, but when he was going on, somehow he could not get up, and one of his fingers stuck to its back, and he could not get it away. So he asked his brother, who was one of those that were on the horse, to cut his finger through, which his brother did, and that was what saved him. The horse carried all the others into the loch, and they were all lost, and they said the water was red with their blood, and livers.

Maclagan Mss: 8055 (from Norman MacAndrew, Ardgay).

F68.B1.8 *The water-wraith of Loch Lindie*

The story of Madge is the one I intend giving you, word for word as the hermit told it to me. On a fine summer Sunday evening a number of boys from the down end the parish, who never heard of Madge, went a strolling to see Loch Lindie. On

coming near the loch they all admired both loch and surroundings. Close to the edge of the water was grazing a beautiful piebald pony. One of the boys said to the others 'Come let us have a ride with the pony round the loch'. One went up, and another saw plenty of room for more. They all took their seat on the pony, till twelve took their seat, never taking note as one by one was taking his seat that the pony was inch by inch getting longer. The thirteenth boy (for that was their number), seeing there was no room for him, thrust his finger into the side of the pony, and there it stuck; and being alarmed, the poor boys tried to free themselves, but impossible. One of the boys on horseback took his pocket-knife and cut off his companion's finger to give the alarm of the sad end of the others. As soon as their parents heard the news, they started for the loch, but to their horror and grief they found nothing and saw nothing but torn caps and the bodies of the boys floating like buoys on the surface of the loch. If this is given to show the power of the water-wraith or as a word to the young not to profane the Sabbath, the hermit only can tell.

Nicholson (ed.) 1897: 18-19.

F68.B1.9 *Golden Horse of Loch na Gillie* [note in Mss: 'or Ghillie']

A loch on this estate – now small and muddy, once much larger – at the time when it received its name from the following sad event.

A dozen lads were playing by its bank – riding and chasing the ponies which grazed among the reeds and rushes. They all quarelled who should mount a beautiful horse, who grazed among the others, but was finer than any they had ever seen. Its skin was smooth, hay coloured, and shining like gold. Two boys jumped up. 'There is room for three', said the next, and got on. 'There is room for four', said the fourth lad, and so there was, for the more boys mounted him, the more the golden horse lengthened. At last all the boys sat on him, but two, who were brothers. 'Come let me up' said the youngest, touching the horse with his fore finger. But lo, the finger stuck there. It had grown to the golden skin. 'Take your knife, Ian [note in mss: Ean], and cut it off', he cried. His brother did so, and the two ran home together, too much frightened to look behind them and see the fate of the rest. That, no one saw. But by an hour after, the hair and entrails of the boys were scattered all over the water. The golden horse had plunged with all his victims and the loch is called by their name, to this day.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff. 34a-34b (from Widow M. Calder).

Compare with 'The Golden Horse of LochnaGillie', as presented in Nicholson (ed.) 1897: 21

A loch on this estate, now small and muddy, but once much larger, at the time when it received its name from the following sad event:

A dozen lads were playing by its banks, riding and chasing the ponies which grazed among reeds and rushes. They all quarelled who should mount a beautiful horse which grazed among the others, but was finer than any they had ever seen; its skin was smooth, bay-coloured, and shining like gold. Two boys jumped up. 'There is room for three', said the next, and got on. 'There is room for four', said the fourth lad, and so there was; for the more boys mounted him the more the golden horse lengthened. At last all the boys sat on him, but two who were brothers. 'Come let us up', said the youngest, touching the horse with his forefinger; but lo! the finger stuck there, it had grown to the golden skin. 'Take your knife, Ian, and cut it off', he cried.

His brother did so, and the two ran home together, too much frightened to look behind them and to see the fate of the rest. That no one saw, but by an hour after the hair and entrails of the boys were scattered all over the water. The golden horse had plunged in with all his victims, and the loch is called by their name to this day.

F68.B1.10 *Water horse and the fool*

The reciter whose dwelling is on the north side of Lochussie, when asked if she had ever heard anything about a water horse being seen in, or about the loch, said that she had heard of that often, and proceeded to give the following version of a tradition which appears to be widely current in the district. She said:

There was a water horse in the loch, and one sabbath day it came up on *Cnon-na-dunaich*, over there, and there were twelve boys there – they were saying that one of them was a fool, that is he was not quite wise. Well the whole twelve boys got on the horse's back, and the horse made for the loch. The boys were all stuck on and could not get off, but when the fool saw how it was likely to end, he put his finger on the horse, and his finger stuck, and this let the rest of him go: so he took his knife and cut away his finger, and slipping himself off, he left his finger and got free. The horse went right into the loch, taking along with it the other eleven boys and the fool's finger, and they were all lost, and were never heard tell of after that.

Maclagan Mss: 7167 (from Mrs MacKenzie, Lochussie, Rossshire).

F68.B1.11 *Variant of Lochussie's water horse*

The reciter, who lives in the neighbourhood of the last informant, gave a variant as follows:

My father and grandfather lived where I am living now, and I often heard of a water horse that used to live in the loch (Lochussie), and I also heard this story about it. One time, they were saying it was on a sabbath, some boys were playing on *Cnoc na dunaich*, that is yonder where you see the field of turnip up from the edge of the loch, and seeing the water horse which had come up on the land, and it looking so pretty, they got on its back to have a ride, and away the horse went with them, and they could not get off. (It is believed that if a person gets on a water horse, he cannot get off, unless he had its reins. If he had that, he could command it.) But one of the boys struck the horse with his hand and one of his fingers stuck to it, and it seems this freed himself in some way, and when he saw that they would all be carried into the loch, he cut his finger right through, and having managed to let himself slide off, he got clear, all except the finger which still stuck to the horse. The other boys, still sticking to the horse were carried into the loch, and never heard of, or seen after that.

Maclagan Mss: 7167-7168 (from Mr MacGregor, Lochussie, Rossshire).

F68.B1.12 *Water horse of Loch buidhe*

The reciter, a man of intelligence, referring to the many 'strange stories' that one often hears about water horses, said:

I heard my mother often telling about a water horse that used to be seen in Lochbuidhe. She said that according to the stories about it, it used to come up on the dry land at times, and would be seen eating along the side of the loch, just like an ordinary horse. One sabbath day some boys saw it, and as boys are always fond of horses some of them suggested that it would be nice to have a ride on it. They thought it was a right horse, and it looked very pretty. So one got on its back first,

and it was very quiet, and then the others took courage, and went on, one after another till there were four of five on its back. It then made for the loch and nothing could stop it, nor could they get off – it seems that when a person is once on a water horse, he sticks to it, and cannot come off. But one of the boys saw how the matter was going to end, and feeling his finger sticking to the horse's skin, he managed to get his knife out of his pocket with his other hand, and cutting away his finger, left it there, but got the rest of himself free. He was just in time, for as soon as he had time to look about him, after rising to his feet, he saw the horse disappearing in the water, and all the other boys still sticking to it. They were all lost, and never seen after that, not anything more heard about them.

Maclagan Mss: 7910-7911 (from Mr Mathison, Swordale, Sutherlandhire).

F68.B1.13 *The Kelpie Loch*

The informant was shown a tiny loch by Mr Stewart who lived in Brin House in Strath Dearn. This loch was alleged to have been inhabited by a kelpie. On one occasion, a child touched the horse but his mother cut off the child's finger and the beast went back screeching into the water.

SA1969.57.B5 (from Dr I. F. Grant, Nairn).

F68.B1.14 *The Seven Herds of Sallachie and the Water-Horse*

Long ago, when men and flocks and herds was [sic] plenty in Sutherland, there were seven herds watching their flocks by Loch Shin. It was evening and they all quarelled who should mount a beautiful horse who grazed among the others. Said one herd to the other 'I bet it is my father's horse'. 'No, it is *my* father's horse'. And they fell to fighting, for the horse looked different to each of them, till the first jumped up. 'There is room for two', said the second, and jumped up. The others were angry, and jumped up after them. The horse lengthened out to hold them all. 'It is a bonny horse too', said a girl that came by when they were all up but one. And she patted its shining skin. But her hand had stuck to it. 'Oh! Aunach!', cried her brother, 'will ye die with the others, or want of hand'. 'Oh! take off the hand and let us run'. So he took the hand off and they two to run home [sic]. And the seven herds of Sallachie were never seen again.

Note: This is nearly the same as the Legend of Loch na Ghillie and a third that is current of Loch Badadarroch or the Loch of the Oak branches, where two girls were the victims and no one remained to tell the tale. Any one collecting these traditions will see that a story lives in the heart of the people and every man identifies it with himself, his family, and the ten miles square with which he is familiar.

Campbell Mss 50.1 13/ ff. 43b-44a.

B2 – THANKS TO CHRISTIAN PROTECTION

F68.B2.1 *Lochan nan Ighean, The Loch of the Girls*

(over at the Hill of Bunrannaoch, in Strath Tummel)

Five girls and a lad went from Glen Fincastle up to the loch to spend their time there. The boy's mother put a (New) Testament in his pocket and they went to the loch, and when they were at the loch, a speckled horse came to the edge of the loch. One of the girls thought she would go and ride on it, and when this girl went up to ride on it, the horse went on its two knees at the edge of the loch. When another girl

saw there was room there, she climbed up too, and as each girl mounted, there was plenty of room for another girl till the five of them were riding on it. When the five were riding on it, the horse jumped into the loch with them.

The boy ran home to tell the story as it happened to the girls, and when their parents came to the loch to look for them, they found only bits of their lungs floating on the loch. And that's why it's called Lochan nan Ighean (the Loch of the Girls) to this day.

Lady Evelyn Stewart-Murray Mss, vol. 3, Story 69. Transl. from the Gaelic by Tony Dilworth.

F68.B2.2 *The advice of the cailleach*

Another version [in addition to 'Water horse in Lochan-larig-eala' – see below F68.B3.1] of the story is to the effect that the children were Sabbath-breakers, and that the boy who escaped happened to have a leaf or two of the Bible in his pocket. A wise old 'cailleach' had advised him always to carry a Bible in his pocket as a protective charm against all evil. Acting on her advice, he had carried the Bible in his pocket till it had all gone to pieces, and nothing remained of it save a few leaves, but these were sufficient to ensure his safety. This version has a too modern look about it, and we know that the old Highlanders were not very strict Sabbatarians. So much for the water horse.

MacDiarmid 1902: 130.

F68.B2.3 *Boys drown in Loch Freesa*

In the *People's friend* for July 26th 1899, there is a story told of four Mull boys who once saw a water horse near Loch Freesa. Three of them got on its back, but the fourth, who had a New Testament in his pocket could not get on. The horse would not stand to let him mount, and so he was saved by having the scriptures on his person, while his three companions were carried into the loch, and were never afterwards seen.

Maclagan Mss: 5786-5787 (from Mr N. Morrison, a native of Carloway, Lewis).

F68.B2.4 *One boy drowned by water horse in Loch Frisa*

There is another story current about this water horse which is evidently a variant of the above. It is:

One time, two school boys were passing Loch Frisa when the water horse (each uisge) happened to be up on the land a little bit from the loch. The boys thought it was an ordinary horse, and proposed to get on its back to have a ride. Fortunately for one of them, he had a bible in his pocket, and the horse would not allow him to get on its back. The bible was the means of saving him, but the other boy got on, and away the horse went with him into the loch, and the boy was never seen again.

Maclagan Mss: 6301-6302 (from L. McDonald, Tobermory, Mull).

B3 – OTHER

F68.B3.1 *Water horse in Lochan-larig-eala*

The 'lochan' is midway between Killin and Lochearnhead, and lies beside the Oban and Killin Railway. The narrative runs thus: – Once upon a time, and on a fine summer day, a party of nine children were playing near the loch, when a white horse

made his appearance, and lay down on the grass. The children could not resist the temptation to have a ride on such a quiet animal, so all mounted his back. Then the horse at once showed himself in his true colours, and was in the water in a twinkling. One of the children, who was seated behind the others, caught hold of the tail and swung himself off the animal's back. His eight companions met with a horrible fate. They disappeared under the water, and the terrified boy hurried home to tell the awful news. Their bodies could not be found, having been devoured by the ferocious and voracious water horse; but the following day, their lungs were found floating on the water, and were reverently buried in a hillock, which is called Cnoc-nan-sgamhan to the present day.

F68.B3.2 *Kelpie in Glenogle*

Another elegant lake in Glenogle, adjacent to the top of the hills passage there, famous for fishing, as trouts, such delicate spotted fish, inhabiting brooks and quick streams. Anent ancient predication of the ensuing narration of Glenogle, which affirms, that ten children, on certain day, doing something fanciful or in frolic merriments, close to the lake above narrated, they were taken unawares to see a horse from the lake; his appearance so avariciously [sic], that they were inordinately desirous to mount him. One of them got up on his back; the rest acted with the same levity, till the ten furnished with room there. No sooner than they were admitted to that dismally seat, than the horse entered the lake concomitantly with the crew; only the hindmost fell over, who brought home the tiding of the fatal event.

McDiarmid 1876 [1815]: 8.

*F77. Woman Carried off by Waterhorse: Never Seen Again

F77.1 *Water horse in Loch na Doruinnich*

The reciter says that when he was residing in the island of Skye, he heard of an each uisge that was said to have inhabited Loch na Doruinnich at one time. It was said to have been very mischievious, and there is a story current to how it, on one occasion, came upon some young girls, who were away with their cattle at a sheiling in Glen Sasaig. The story is that the girls were taken by surprise, and before they could make their escape, or defend themselves in any way, the monster got a hold of them, and injured them.

Maclagan Mss: 5100 (from Mr Hugh Gunn, a native of Kinlochbervie).

F77.2 *Water horse seizes girl*

The reciter says that he heard of the water horse in the island of Mull. There was a tradition of one (some said it was a water bull), that was in Loch Uisg, on the Lochbuie estate. According to the tradition, a girl was one time passing the loch, when she was seized, and carried into the loch, and was never again seen, nor heard of. But the occurrence, it is said, is now so long ago, that beyond the fact, there are no details left.

Maclagan Mss: 7353 (from Mr Macgillivray, Kilbrandon).

F77.3 *Loch-an-Eich-Uisge*

The reciter is a shepherd, and a native of Barra. He said:

There is a small fresh water loch on Eoligary hill called *Loch-an-Eich-Uisge* because a water horse used to be in it. I heard old people telling about one time some women were sitting at the side of a house near this loch, and the horse came up from the loch in the form of a man, and made a rush in among them, and seizing a young girl that was there, carried her away, and nobody ever saw her after that.

Maclagan Mss: 8119-8120 (from Peter McNeill, Eoligary, Barra).

F77.4 *Water-horse in Tiree*

A story is current in Tiree of a party who were on one occasion dancing in the open air. It was late in the evening, and when the fun was at its height, a very handsome looking young man, who appeared to be quite a stranger to every body present, came up, and catching a young lady of the company by the hand, drew her out with him, as if to dance with her. But when he got her outside the circle, he took hold of her, and throwing her on his back, turned himself into a horse, and galloped away with her. She was never afterwards seen, nor heard tell of.

Maclagan Mss: 2420.

F77.5 *The kelpie of Corryvreckan*

Many years ago, Beltane Eve rejoicings were going on at Moy, not far from Loch Buie, in Mull. When the bonfires were blazing, and the dancing and revelry were at a height, there appeared a young and handsome stranger, mounted on a white steed, who seized the loveliest of the village maidens, swung her into the saddle before him, and galloped with her over mountain and moor and rock to the dark sea-shore.

He then dismounted, and asked the maiden if she would be his 'a so suas a chaoidh' (for evermore). Bewildered by this tempestuous wooing, and weary after

travelling the rocky roads on horseback, the girl asked if he was taking her to some dwelling across the sea, or if he had a ship waiting for her, as she fain would rest. To this he replied:

'I have no dwelling beyond the sea,
I have no good ship waiting for thee.
Thou shalt sleep with me on a couch of foam
And the depths of the ocean shall be thy home.'

Only then did she realise that she had been carried off by none other than the dreaded 'Kelpie of Corryvreckan', who could assume man's form at will. She turned her eyes on the horse, and saw that its saddle was of seaweed, its bridle of pearl, and its bit of coral. Its mane was like the froth of the waves; and as she gazed, it plunged into the billows and became one with the foam of the sea. Its erstwhile rider then seized her in his arms and bore her with him into the green depths. The maiden's shrieks were heard above the loud roaring of the blast, as they sank

'Down to the rocks where the serpents creep
Twice five hundred fathoms deep.'

Next morning, a fisherman saw her corpse floating near the shore, and recognised her by her lily-white skin and golden hair. She was buried under a rock on the shore, with the dirge of the wave for requiem. Every year on Beltane Eve it is said that the Kelpie gallops across the green on his sea-horse swift as the wind, with the mournful ghost of the maiden held fast on the saddle before him.

Robertson 1961: 137-138.

F94. Waterhorse as Workhorse

A – Taken for a Ride

A1) Rider Carried off into Loch

F94.A1.1 *Beaton's Loch*

A man named Beaton led the peaceful, if sometimes busy life, of a farmer on the estate of Ellary in South Knapdale, Argyllshire. It was in the time when every rood of ground maintained its man, and before the estate passed out of the hands of the genial and popular lairds of Shirvain. Beaton's stock was a small one and certain it is that one horse sufficed to work his farm for him. It seems very probable that for him, light labour spread her wholesome store; just gave what life required but gave no more. But to the point: Beaton used to allow his horse the sun of the hills when there was nothing particular to do. Amongst those hills are numerous lochs. Going one day for his horse, our friend found it grazing by the side of one of those. He rode it home and worked it all day. In the evening, he began to think that altho' this horse was very like his own, still there was a difference, and supposing it was a neighbours', which had been let loose to graze amongst the hills, he rode away with it. Night came and at last gave way to the gray dawn of another day, and still poor Beaton did not put in an appearance in his home. The neighbours were now aroused and all set off to scour the hills in search of the missing man. Here and there they came across the footprints of a horse. They followed those as best they could and they brought them to the brink of a loch. The sight which met their gaze turned them sick with horror. The loch was red with gore and now for the first time did they think that the animal, which wrought a day's work in Ellary was none other than the water-horse, and poor Beaton was never seen dead or alive

Maclagan Mss: 83 (from A. G., Ardrishaig, Sept. 1893).

F94.A1.2 *Each Uisge in Tiree*

It is said that Loch-a-Bhuille in Tiree is haunted by a water-horse, and a story is told of two lads who encountered it on one occasion. The story is that the two young men were going to a friend's house one night air cheilidh, and on their way they met a fine looking horse. They thought it was a good chance to have a ride, and so they both got on its back, and rode, all night, to the house to which they were going. Leaving the horse outside, they went in and made a long ceilidh, till it was pretty late. When, at last, they were starting for home, they found the horse, out near the house, where they had left it. Again they both got on its back, and proceeded homewards. They were getting on very well, when one of them happened to put his hand on the horse's side, and felt it wet, and soft, with a sort of a cold feel. He was sure there was something wrong, and slipped off its back as quickly as he could and ran, and so got safely away. His companion remained on, and was never after that heard tell of. It was believed that it was a water horse they were riding all the time, and that it carried him along with itself into Loch-a-Bhuille.

Maclagan Mss: 1800-1801.

F94.A1.3 *Each Uisge in Mull – Loch Frisa*

It is told that on one occasion, two men were walking together on the road in the direction of Gleann Mhor in Mull, and on coming near Loch Frisa, they saw a beautiful looking horse grazing a little above the loch. The horse took no notice of them, appearing to be quite quiet; and on coming up to it, one of the men leaped on its back. In a moment the horse was off in the direction of the loch, into which it plunged with great fury, and the man was never again seen either living or dead. A search was made to recover his body, but all that was ever got of him was his liver.

Maclagan Mss: 1800.

F94.A1.4 *Water horse in Loch Frisa*

There is a loch on the Estate of Aros, in Mull, called Loch Frisa. It used to be said that this loch was the haunt of a water-horse; and a story is still told, how that on one occasion, a son of Fear Arois (the laird's son), saw a beautiful horse grazing on the meadow, beside the loch, and thinking it was one of his father's horses, leaped on its back to have a ride, and was never afterwards heard tell of. And people believed, it is said, that it was the Each Uisge, and that it must have carried him into Loch Frisa.

Maclagan Mss: 1804.

F94.A1.5 *Each Uisge in Loch Frise*

There used to be an each uisge in Loch Frise [sic] in Mull, and there is a current story among the people of that island of a man who came to an unhappy end by it. Here is the story: – This man was one day near Loch Frise, where he saw a lovely grey horse grazing, as he thought. He thought it would be nice to have a ride on it, and so got on its back. It was quite quiet till he was on, but then it set to the galloping, and in less than no time, it plunged, rider and all, into the loch, and nothing of the man was ever seen after that except his heart and liver, which were found at the loch edge. The event was commemorated in song, which, the reciter says, she often heard her mother sing, and which she herself knew in her young days, but has since forgotten it.

Maclagan Mss: 5097-5098 (from Mrs MacKinnon, Tobermory, Mull).

F94.A1.6 *Water horse and the factor of Aros*

A native of Mull says he often heard the following story told, and asserted to be quite true:

Long ago an each uisge inhabited Loch Frisa. It was believed to be a very malicious creature. One time the factor of Aros had people shearing corn down beside this loch. It was a fine harvest day, and the factor himself was out where the people were shearing. The horses were grazing between the shearers and the loch, and they noticed a fine looking animal, beautifully groomed, grazing along with them. The factor said that he would like to have a ride on it, and when he got on its back, it galloped towards the loch, and in a moment both he and it were out of sight, and he was never afterwards seen. All that was seen of him was his liver, which was found at the side of the loch.

Maclagan Mss: 6301 (from L. McDonald, Tobermory).

F94.A1.7 *Mac Fir Arois*

Reference having been made to stories about water horses, the reciter, who was brought up in the neighbourhood of Tobermory, said:

Yes, water horses were in it, as true as it is that we are here. Wasn't Mac Fir Arois drowned in Loch Frisa by one of them. It was on a Saturday it happened, and the horses from this town were up about the loch, and some of the lads went up to have a ride. When they reached where the horses were grazing, they saw a strange one among them. Mac Fir Arois was among the lads. He was at the time about seventeen or eighteen years of age, and he with one or two others got a hold of the strange horse, and got on its back. As soon as they were on it, away it galloped to the loch. The others managed to get off before it reached the water, but Mac Fir Arois was carried into the loch; and a few days after, they found his liver at the edge of the loch. That was all that was ever seen of him. The horse had eaten the rest.

There was a long song (oran caoidh) made to him. Many a time I heard it sung, and at one time I could go through it all myself. It was long, and very pitiful. Here are two lines of it; they are all that I can remember just now:

'S'an Di-sathairn a bhathadh Mac Fir Arois Rosglaich
'S iomadh maighdean, 'us fleasgach bha san fheasgain sin bronach'.

Maclagan Mss: 7681-7682 (from Mrs Donald Maclean, Tobermory).

F94.A1.8 *Mac Fear na Leitnach Mhòr*

A variant has been obtained from another Mull woman. It is as follows:

There was an each uisge in Lochfrisa. One time it was ashore at the Leitir Mhòr, and got among some horses that were grazing near the loch. It looked so pretty that some of the lads took it into their heads to have a ride on it. Mac Fear na Leitneach Mhòr was one of them, and he with five or six others got on its back. It made for the loch with them, but before it reached the water, they all managed to get off except the laird's son (Mac na Leitneach Mhòr), he having been the nearest to the horse's mane could not so easily get slipping off. He was never seen alive after that, nor did they even get his body, for it was eaten by the water horse, all except a little bit that was found at the edge of the loch some time after the thing had happened.

Maclagan Mss: 7682 (no name).

F94.A1.9 *The laird's son*

A native of the Ross of Mull said that in his native island young horses would often be allowed to run wild on the hills till they would be two or three years old. One time there was a laird that wanted one brought from the hill, and he gathered all the lads about the place and sent them away to the hill. His own son went along with them. When they reached the place where the horses were, there was one among them, which they took to be a stray horse from some of the neighbouring hills. It looked like a young one, and it was the prettiest horse any of them had ever seen. Nothing would do with the lad but that they should catch this one, and when they did manage to get a hold of it, after a great deal of running, it seemed quite quiet once the bridle was got on it. The laird's son would ride it in spite of all the others could say to keep him back. So on its back he got, and away the horse went, and there was no power could stop it till it went out of sight in Locharos, and that was the last of the laird's son that was ever seen.

Now that is a true story. It happened, I believe, in my own grandfather's day, and I heard them saying that he had seen some of the lads that were on the hill, and saw

the thing when it happened. The horse is believed to be still there, and is called Locharos water horse. I have seen several people who said they saw it coming to the edge of the loch, and giving itself a shake, and then going back to the loch again.

Maclagan Mss: 8963 (from J. Crawford, Ardpatrick, Argyleshire).

F94.A1.10 *Water horse in Islay*

There is a loch on Scarabus farm in Islay, which is said to be inhabited by a water horse. At a time, long ago, two brothers, of the name of McKay, had the farm, and there is a tradition to the effect that one of them, one day, came on a beautiful black horse grazing on a part of the farm near this loch. Having got a hold of it, he got on its back, and neither he, nor the horse have ever been since. It is said that it was a water horse, and that it leaped into the loch with McKay on its back.

Maclagan Mss: 1010-1010A (from M. McAffer, a native of Islay – written down by Elizabeth Kerr, Portcharlotte, October 1894).

F94.A1.11 *A supernatural horse (lit: a horse beyond nature)*

I have heard mention of the water-horse, but there was one horse that I know of for certain. And there was a clever man there in Coire Dho as well. 'The Fair Mare of Coire Dho' it was. Well they would see it, but there was no one who could catch it. But there was this clever man, and he got a hold of it. They never saw him after that. The final glimpse they saw of him was going into the loch that was here, the Mare and he. Whatever happened she woudn't let him go. I heard that the water-horse was going in the shape of a man and courting the girls, and bringing them into the loch. I heard that anyway. Well this fair mare went all the way to Loch a' Chraich. Well there's a big distance between Coire Dho and Loch a' Chraich, miles and miles. She went off with him and wasn't letting him go.

Calum Maclean Mss 1.7.2: 1575-1576 (from Seumas Warren).

A2) RIDER MANAGES TO ESCAPE

F94.A2.1 *Water horse in Loch Gorm*

Talking of water horses (eich uisge), an old Islay woman said: [Gaelic version]

There were water horses in olden times in Lochgorm. I heard this story from my mother. A man was coming home one night from the market. The man was pretty tired, and he said that he wished he had a horse on which he might ride. The word was no sooner out of his mouth, than he saw a horse at the side of the road, and he jumped on its back. But it was not long till he noticed that it was not a right horse at all that was in it [sic] and he jumped off it. Well, the horse ran down the loch, where there were other horses, and when these felt the smell of the man on him, they fastened on it, and killed it.

Maclagan Mss: 6302-6303 (from Iosabel MacCalman, Conispie, Islay).

F94.A2.2 *Water horse of Loch-nan-Each*

Loch-nan-Each is a fresh water loch near Tayniloan in Kintyre. It is supposed to be the deepest loch in the locality. It has taken its name from a legend to the effect that it was inhabited by a water horse. There is a hill beside the loch, called Cruach-nan-Each on which it is said the horse was in the habit of taking exercise. Long ago, a shepherd was going along Cruach-nan-Each, when he saw what he supposed to

have been his own horse. He leaped on its back, and was riding it home, when at a place called Bealach gaoithe, the wind became so strong that the rider was thrown off the horse's back. The horse galloped away and by and by lost its hames (*Bràid*). The place where the Hames were found is still called 'Braid'. A little further on, it lost its straw collar, and where the collar was found is called till this day 'Tigh-an-t-sugan'. The horse itself vanished, as if by magic, but the remainder of its harness was found afterwards in pieces at the edge of the loch. Time went on, and no trace of the horse was seen, at least, no one told if they found any trace of it, until about fifteen years ago, a farmer with his shepherd were on the Cruach, after a snow storm, looking for sheep, and they found the tracks of the horse's feet from the Cruach down to the loch. In confirmation of the belief that the horse is still there, the natives assert that the loch teems with horse leeches.

Maclagan Mss: 716-716A (From M. McCallum, a native of Kintyre – written down by Elizabeth Kerr, Portcharlotte, August 1894).

F.94.A2.3 *Water horse of Baile-Mhonaidh*

The following Islay story, showing the peoples' ideas of the water horse, is related by an Islay man, and taken down as nearly as possible in his own words: [Gaelic version] There was a man at one time residing in Baile-Mhonaidd. He was a brave man. He was going home from Bowmore one night, and since he had walked both going and coming, he was growing pretty tired. Down the side of the shore, he saw some kind of beast between himself and the sea. It happened to the night that it was pretty dark, and he said to himself that he would go down to see what kind of beast it was. What was it but a horse, and up he leaped on its back, and away went the horse as hard as it was able to run, and stop, nor stop came on it [sic], until it reached Baile-Monaidh. The man now began thinking that it was not a right horse at all, and he took an opportunity to let himself off as easily as was possible to him, and when the horse got free, it was down to the shore like lightning, and it was never again seen.

Maclagan Mss: 5784-5785 (from John McNiven, Portcharlotte, Islay).

B – Waterhorse Caught with Bridle and Made to Work

B1) Dragging stones

F94.B1.1 *The Deveron Kelpie*

A farmer, who had some very heavy improvements on hand, by some stratagem got the brute bridled, and so reduced to servitude. Many a heavy load of stones he made him drive, and, so long as he was bridled, the farmer could catch him and compel him to work. But one day, or night, the kelpie made up to some stroller on the river side, and got him to pet him, and finally relieve him of the bridle. He instantly cantered off snorting out flashes of fire, exclaiming, as he disappeared in a deep pool, 'Sair back and sair banes, cae'd a' Berryley's stanes.'

Whether it was the veritable bridle that this water kelpie of the Deveron was relieved of or not, I cannot say; but a water kelpie's bridle, or some part of one, was said to be in the possession of a person in the Strathaven district. It was believed to be a sort of charm, and to give its possessor great power against the cantrips of those uncanny people who leagued themselves with the powers of darkness to work evil

upon the persons and properties, but more particularly on the livestock, of their neighbours. I have heard it asserted that the virtues of this wonderful relic were sometimes put to the test so late as 40 years ago. But whether it still retains its efficacy or even if it be still in existence I cannot say.

Yeats 1887: 60-61.

F94.B1.2 *The Inverugie Kelpie*

A man in carting home his peats for winter fuel was in the habit of seeing a big black horse grazing on the banks of the Ugie, at Inverugie Castle, near Peterhead, each morning as he passed to the 'moss'. He told some of his neighbours. They suspected what the horse was, and advised the man to get a 'waith-horse' [?] bridle, approach the animal with all care and caution, and cast the bridle over his head. The man now knew the nature of the creature, and followed the advice. Kelpie was secured, and did good work in carrying stones to build the bridge over the Ugie at Inverugie. When his services were no longer needed he was set at liberty. As he left he said:

'Sehr back an sehr behns
Cairryt a' the Brig o' Innerugie stehns'.

The old man, who handed down this story to his children, from one of whom I have now got it, used to say to any of them that complained of being tired after a hard day's work: 'Oh, aye, ye're like the kelpie that cairryt the stehns to build the brig o' Innerugie, "sehr back an sehr banes".'

Gregor 1883: 292.

F94.B1.3 *The Kelpie and the Laird of Urey*

If the kelpie could be overcome and put into harness much useful work could be got out of him. Through 'black art' the Laird of Urey in the Mearns had power to do this. He used him so it was said to cart all the stones for the building of his castle. It was no light job, for the poor kelpie was heard repeating –

'Sair back and sair banes
With carting the Laird of Urey's stanes'.

Hugh Oagh Mss: f. 41.

F94.B1.4 *Kelpie at St Vigean's*

Sair back and sair banes
Carryin' the kirk o' St Vigean's stanes.

The church of St Vigean's, near Arbroath, is situated on the top of a small eminence, and this necessitated considerable labour in conveying thereto the necessary building materials. Tradition has it that the services of a kelpie were, much against his will, enlisted into the work, and the unwonted labour caused him to give utterance to the above plaint. How the kelpie came to be thus employed is not stated but it was believed that if a bridle could be placed on his head, while in the shape of a horse, he could be made slave to humanity. If, however, the bridle was at any time removed, that moment witnessed the kelpie's liberation. Probably it was owing to his being so bridled that the creature was got to convey stones to the building in question. A story to this effect is related to the building of the farm of Stone of Morphie, in Kincardineshire.

Grewar 1912: 166.

F94.B1.5 *The kelpy and the Laird of Morphie*

The old family of the Grahams of Morphie was in former times very powerful, but at length they sunk in fortune, and finally the original male line became extinct. Among the old women of the Mearns, their decay is attributed to a supernatural cause. When one of the lairds, say they, built the old castle, he secured the assistance of the water-kelpy or river-horse, by the accredited means of throwing a pair of branks over his head. He then compelled the robust spirit to carry prodigious loads of stones for the building, and did not relieve him till the whole was finished. The poor kelpy was glad of his deliverance, but at the same time felt himself so galled with the hard labour, that on being permitted to escape from the branks, and just before he disappeared in the water, he turned about, and expressed, in the following words, at once his own grievances and the destiny of his taskmaster's family:

Sair back and sair banes,
Drivin' the laird o' Morphie's stanes!
The laird o' Morphie will never thrive
As lang 's the kelpy is alive!

Chambers 1826: 334-335.

F94.B1.6 *The kelpie of Morphie (variant)*

A pool in the North Esk, in Forfarshire, called the Ponage, or Pontage Pool, was at one time the home of the water-horse. This creature was captured by means of a magical bridle, and kept in captivity for some time. While a prisoner he was employed to carry stones to Morphie, where a castle was being built. One day the bridle was incautiously removed, and the creature vanished, but not before he exclaimed:

'Sair back an' sair banes,
Carryin' the Laird o' Morphie's stanes;
The Laird o' Morphie canna thrive
As lang's the kelpy is alive.'

His attempted verse-making seems to have gratified the kelpy, for when he afterwards showed himself in the pool he was frequently heard repeating the rhyme. The fate of the castle was disastrous. At a later date it was entirely demolished, and its site now alone remains.

MacKinlay 1893: 176.

F94.B1.7 *The miller of Morphie and the Kelpie*

A native of Tarland says that in his native place the kelpie was believed in, and greatly dreaded. It was supposed to have its headquarters in the water, but made frequent invasions on land, sometimes in the form of a man. There were many stories current about its doings in the reciter's young days. One of these, which was a favourite, and was often rehearsed, was 'The miller of Morphie and the Kelpie'.

According to this story, it appears there was a miller at one time at Morphie who was greatly annoyed by a kelpie that was constantly after him, and if the miller was out anywhere at night, the kelpie was sure to be in his way on his home going. One night, as usual, the miller having been from home, was met by the kelpie, when he was returning. By this time the miller had become well acquainted with the kelpie's manoeuvres, he watched his opportunity, and at last got hold of the kelpie's bridle.

This gave him complete command, and getting the bridle on, he had nothing to do but to lead the kelpie quietly home. The miller was just then going to start to build a new mill, and he kept the kelpie, and made it carry every stone, and every thing else that was needed for the new building. And when the mill was finished, the kelpie pronounced its ill wish regarding the miller in these words:

Sair back, sair banes
Carrying the Miller o' Morphie's stanes.
The Miller o' Morphie 'll never thrive,
As lang as a kelpie is alive.

Maclagan Mss: 7205 (from Mr Cameron, Tarland).

F94.B1.8 *Epilogue to the Miller of Morphie*

A native of Tarland, referring to the kelpie's bridle which the miller of Morphie is said to have got in his possession, says there is a tradition in the place still, explaining how the kelpie got away. This is the story. The miller had given strict orders that the bridle was not to be taken off the kelpie for any reason, either by night or by day; and for a long time these orders were attended to. But one day, a girl that was serving with the miller, being sorry for the kelpie, removed its bridle, that, as she thought, it might, with more comfort, eat some oats she had given it, and as soon as she had done it, it went away singing: 'Sair back, etc.'.

Maclagan Mss: 7258.

B2) PLOUGHING

F94.B2.1 *Halter of horse hair*

The same authority [see Belief – Barra; no names] referred to a case that is said to have happened on the island of Mingulay. A man who was living on that island caught a water horse and kept it by means of a halter made of horse hair (*taod gaoisdei*). It would work as well as any horse, but at last he lost it through his own carelessness. This was the way it happened. One night when he was letting the horse out on the grass, he neglected to shake the halter after it, and away it went, and was never seen again.

They say that as long as one shakes the horse hair halter after a horse when letting it go, it will never go away, nor will any beast come near it. The horse hair halter charms it in some way.

Maclagan Mss: 8118 (no name).

F94.B2.2 *Belief in the power of the bridle*

A native of the island of Lewis says that the belief in the water horse (each uisge) and also in a monstrous beast, resembling an eel, was very common among Lewis people. Of the each uisge, it was believed that if one secured a charmed bridle, he could easily put it on the horse, and would find him as manageable as any ordinary horse.

Maclagan Mss: 6303 (from Mr M. Lennan, Bernera, Lewis).

F94.B2.3 *MacDonald and the water horse*

There was one time a man in Lochboisdale, in South Uist, who got a hold of a water horse some way or other. It was a beautiful black horse, and as long as it was

properly managed, it would work away as well as any horse, and was quite tame. The man had a croft, and he would have the water horse working on the croft, and treated it in every way just like an ordinary horse, but one thing, he needed always to keep it reined in a certain way. One day he had it in the plough, and when he took it out of the plough at night to go home, he jumped on its back to ride home, but forgot some thing about the bridle. No sooner was he on its back, than away it went at a gallop towards the sea, and no matter what the man would say or do, the horse would not slacken an inch. At last, when MacDonald – that was the man's name – saw that the horse was like to be in to the loch [sic] and that there was nothing for it, but either to kill the horse, or be drowned himself. He just took his biodag, and stuck it into the horse, and down it fell dead under him. That man's descendants are still there, and this story of their ancestor and his water horse is often told.

Maclagan Mss: 6550 (from John Ferguson, a native of South Uist).

F94.B2.4 *Water horse and the birch bridle*

A native of Lochbroom said with reference to the belief in the existence of water horses:

I have heard often of the water horse, and there was a man in our place who put a bridle on one once. It was this way. There is a loch in our place – they call it Loch-an-gàradh-mòr, and it was commonly reported that a water horse had been seen going about it. Well, this man went one evening for his own horse that had been grazing on the hill, and when he reached the end of this loch, he saw what he took to be his own horse, it was so like it, as he thought. The man was pleased to find his horse so easily, and going forward to it, he spoke to it as he was in the habit of speaking to his own horse. 'Tha thu 'n so a ghille' (you are here lad); and the horse stood without moving till the man put the bridle on it. It was not a bridle like the ones that are in it now, but a thing made of birch twigs. It was called a *gad*. When the man got the thing on the horse's head, he went away as usual holding the end of the gad in his hand, which was behind his back, and he walking on before the horse. He had not gone far when he wondered to find the thing so light on his hand, and when he looked behind him, lo and behold! the horse was gone, and nothing left but this gad. It was then he discovered that it had been the water horse and not his own horse at all that he had caught.

Maclagan Mss: 7168-7169 (from Donald MacLeod, Contin, Rossshire).

F94.B2.5 *Water horse from Lochness bridled*

An old man, who belongs to the parish of Bona, Invernessshire, said that he heard a brother of his telling of a man who lived on the opposite side of Lochness, who succeeded in getting a water horse bridled, and after that, could lead him anywhere, and get him to work like an ordinary horse. The reciter says that he himself remembers seeing the man, and he believes what was said about him was true enough.

Maclagan Mss: 7353 (from Mr Macdonald, Dochfaur, Inverness).

F94.B2.6 *Farmer in Knapdale*

A Lochfyne man said:

[T]here was a farmer in Knapdale, and they said he had a way of catching a water horse that was in a loch near him, when it would come out on the land; and when he

would get it bridled, he could work it like any ordinary horse, and when the work would be done, he would let it go off to the water again.

Maclagan Mss: 8972 (from J. Sinclair, Furnace, Lochfyne).

F94.B2.7 *Water horse in Scalpay*

The reciter, who belongs to the island of Skye, says that people there believed firmly in the real existence of the each uisge. The popular notion is that it is amphibious, and very mischievious. It may however be made quite tame, at least for the time, by sprinkling newly ploughed earth on it, and in that case it can easily be got to work as well as any ordinary horse. The reciter used to hear people tell of a water horse that had its quarters in a loch that is on the island of Scalpay. One time a crofter there was ploughing when he saw a strange horse grazing quite near. He suspected it was the each uisge, and so taking a handful of the newly turned up earth, he went up to the horse, and when he had got near enough to it, he scattered the earth over it, and immediately had it harnessed to his plough. It ploughed quite quietly all day until the evening, but as soon as it was taken out of the plough harness, it ran towards the loch, into which it plunged, and was never seen afterwards.

Maclagan Mss: 5099-5100 (from Mr Ross, a native of Broadford, Skye).

F94.B2.8 *John MacInnes's Loch*

At the head of Glenmore, six miles from the Kirkton of Glenelg, there is a small loch about which the following story is told.

A crofter-farmer, named John MacInnes, found the labour of his farm sadly burdensome. In the midst of his sighing an unknown being appeared to him and promised a horse to him under certain conditions. These conditions John undertook to fulfil. One day, accordingly, he found a fine horse grazing in one of his fields. He happened to be ploughing at the time, and at once he yoked the animal to the plough along with another horse. The stranger worked splendidly, and he determined to keep it, though he well knew that it was far from 'canny'. Every night, when he stabled it, he spread some earth from a mole's hill over it as a charm (according to another version he merely blessed the animal). One night he forgot his usual precautions; perhaps he was beginning to feel safe. The horse noticed the omission, and, seizing poor John in his teeth, galloped off with him. The two disappeared in the loch. *Hinc nomen*! Some time after, John's liver was found near the loch, at a place known since as the 'Corrie of the Liver'.

Calder Ross 1893: 134.

F94.B2.9 *John MacInnes's Loch (variant)*

The many small lochs which are to be found in the hills of the Highlands have, as a rule, very straightforward names, but occasionally, these names hide an interesting story. Such a loch is in the parish of Glenelg in Inverness-shire, and called Loch Iain Mhic Aonghais, or John MacInnes's Loch. A man of that name once farmed Suardalan, a hill-farm on the Glenmore River. He was walking by the side of the loch one day, when he saw a handsome black horse which he had not seen before. Thinking that it was a stray, he led it home, and it proved a useful animal for ploughing, carting and other work around the farm. Late one evening, John was riding the horse on his way home from a day's work in the hill. As they reached the loch where the horse was first seen, it bolted and rushed headlong into the loch,

carrying the man with it. Neither was ever seen again; and the loch is called Loch Iain Mhic Aonghais to this day.

Tocher 1977-1978 (27): 182 (from John MacAskill, Scalasaig, Glenelg; recorded by I. Fraser, January 1973).

F94.B2.10 *Mr Willock and the Kelpie*

A member of a family by the name of Willock, who farm the land near Grantown, encountered a kelpie which was reputed to inhabit a slough which lay where now there is a railway cutting on the Strath Spey-Strath Dearn railway line. Being emboldened with drink, he tackled the horse, mastered it and brought it home where it was a successful work horse for many years. After the man's death, the bridle was thrown away and immediately the kelpie gave a screech and disappeared.

SA1969.57.B6 (inf. Dr I. F. Grant).

F94.B2.11 *The Boobrie as the Echuisk*

The next authentic record of the Boobrie is his appearance as the Echuisk or Water horse.

On the bank of Loch Frisa, a fresh water lake on the property of Achadashenaig in the island of Mull, the tenant was ploughing some land which was so hard and stoney that he was compelled to use four horses. Early one day, one of the horses cast a shoe, they were nine miles from a smithy, and the nature of the groundprevented any possibility of the horse ploughing without one. 'Here is the best part of the day gone', said the tenant to his son, who was leading the foremost horses. 'I am not sure', replied the son, 'I see a horse feeding beside the loch, we'll take a lend of him as we don't know who he belongs to'. The father approved of the proposal and the son went down and fetched up the horse, which appeared to have been quite used to ploughing. Drawing first up-hill, then down, perfectly steadily, until they reached the end of the furrow, close to the loch. On an attempt to turn the horses, this borrowed one became rather restive, which brought the whip into use, tho lightly. No sooner had the thong touched him than he instantly assumed the form of a most enormous Boobrie, and uttering a rout, which appeared to shake the earth, plunged into the loch carrying with him the three horses and plough. The tenant and his son both had the sense to let go their respective holds. The Boobrie swam out to the middle of the loch, where he dived, carrying them along with him to the bottom, where he apparently took his pleasure of them. The tenant and his son got a most awful fright (as well may be imagined) but remained hid behind a large stone for seven hours, in the earnest hope of perhaps even one of their horses coming ashore but no.

In case, by any chance, this narrative should appear, to the sceptical, flavour in the least, of romance, it must be remembered, that in those days, ploughs were almost entirely made of wood. One of our modern iron ploughs would in my opinion give even a Boobrie a sweat to drag along with three horses to the middle of a loch.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff.78-78b.

F94.B2.12 *Each Uisge in the loch at Ardnahoe, Islay*

There is a loch near Ardnahoo – a loch Nisge – and report says that waterhorse used to be seen occasionally on the banks of this loch, whenever they could get time or opportunity to come ashore and feed.

A time before this time, the *tuathanach* of Ardnahoo was a *fear* of the name of Neil òg Ardhanhoo. And one day of days, he was going to the market at Killarrow which was then the *baile mor Ila*. He told one of his servant to go and get the *each naine* which was feeding at the side of the loch. (*naine* is a colour between *don* and *odhar*, and it would seem to be uncommon for the teller of this story here said that – he once saw a horse of this colour). The servant went as he was told. And near the side of the loch he saw a horse feeding. And having no doubt it was the very one he was sent for, he brought it home and saddled and bridled it for its master. Neil òg mounted as usual and set off for the market. The horse went *gu sunndach*, and nothing extraordinary took place although before they had gone very far, Neil òg could not help wondering at the pieces of withered reed – wet mosses – and *lochan bhogan* (which I suppose is slime) that he saw on the horse's mane. But he thought, as he had been feeding on the side of the loch, that the animal must just have been rolling itself over, as horses sometimes do – and so for the mud and weeds about it.

In this way they reached Killarow. Neil òg got his horse stabled, and went and did his business in the market until evening. When he returned to the stable – the sun was near setting – the each naine was no sooner led out than he began to leap and frisk fearfully. Neil òg however mounted and turned homeward. He got as far as Òrabus pretty quietly. But there again, the horse began to leap and frisk fearfully till he shook his rider in the saddle and rushed on madly (air a' chaothach). When going up Glen ---- [sic] he was so wild that Neil òg at times could hardly command him (ceansich), and as they passed Port and Eilan, he could hold him no longer. He let him go and tried only to keep himself from falling through every leap the horse gave. He was nearly out of the saddle – Neil òg was now really frightened and did not know what to do. He was afraid to throw himself off, he was afraid to keep on, and to stop the horse was altogether out of the question.

He remembered there was a cachladh criche before him, and resolved to throw himself off there. So as he approached the place, he took his feet out of the stirrups and made ready. The cachla fortunately was open. The horse rushed through. The great stick that kept the cachla up was quite close. Neil òg threw his arms round it and held on. The horse swept from between his feet and Neil òg slipped safe to the ground. Away went the horse without pause. And away went Neil òg after him. The wild creature held right on, but not to the house nor the stables. He took along the side of the loch and then leaped in. Neil òg stood on the banks looking and listening for a while. In a minute or two he heard such a like *sgreadail – sgreuchail* [?] *nuallach*, as of horses fighting savagely rising out of the loch. He went home, took supper, went to bed, told nothing of what had happened to any one, and next morning rose early, and went out and called his gille, who asked him why he ahd not called him up last night when he returned to look after his horse. Neil òg gave no answer but bade the gille to follow him to the loch. When they reached it, they found the *each naine* feeding there quite quietly. The servant thought his master had left him there himself the night before. Neil òg passed on and by and by they came on pieces of *sgamhan*, other things like *sgeith reulte*, and fragments of a saddle and bridle torn to pieces lying scattered about. The servant said nothing because he saw his master was very much troubled as if something was on his mind. They went home and after breakfast, Neil òg assembled all the people in his house, servants and stragglers together and told them every word I now tell you.

Ever after this, they neither saw nor felt anything unusual about this loch. Whether it was that the creatures killed one another, or that they left the place, there is no *fios*. But people knew well enough at that time about waterhorses and waterbulls – that the like of them were and that they lived in *frógacar* [?] and *tuill* (holes and crevices) at the side of the lochs, and that they were like the *beist dubh*, able to live in the water or on shore. But people multiplying, and these creatures getting no opportunity for pasture or *silteachd* for they were very shy, they went away *uidh air n' uidh* till now there is not one of them to be found or anywhere heard of.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff. 445a-447a.

F94.B2.13 *The waterhorse of Glenastle Loch*

Well, this is the way it was. A man in the Oa was going to the Candlemas or Lammas market, maybe a hundred and twenty years ago. And he went for his horse and found him as he thought at the side of Glenastil Loch, along with the other horses. He caught him and put the saddle on him and rode him to Bowmore (so the man said but he must have meant Killarow) as quiet as could be. But when he had left the market to go home again, the horse went on as he never went before. And every mile they were going he was getting worse and worse, till at last when they got out of the *Muran* into the *traigh mhor*, the man could not hold him at all, at all. There was great wonder on him. What had come over his horse that used to be so quiet? But at the end his wonder ceased and his fear began. When he looked and saw some of the *liobhragach nan locha* growing in the horse's mane. Then he knew in a minute that it was not his own right horse he had, but a water horse.

He tried as well as he could to throw himself off, but this was not so easy. The horse was going dreadfully fast. So they stuck together till they came to the march dyke between Frachdal and Glenastil, where there was a narrow opening in which there used to be a 'cachladh'. The place was pretty soft and into this the man let himself fall, thinking that though he should break his bones, he could not be worse off than he already was at any rate. But fortunately it was so soft that he came to no harm.

Away went the horse with the saddle and the bridle as fast as ever. But the man went home. He told how it all was, and next day they went out and the side of the loch, found the horse and saddle in their bits, torn asunder by the other water-horses, because they felt the smell of the man and saw the saddle on him. The man's own horse which he thought he had going to the market was found in the place he ought to be in, safe and sound.

Note: This story was told by Lachlan MacAulay, Laggan. It is very nearly the same as one I sent you before. ... Signed: Thomas Pattison, March 12, 1861. (addressed to J. F. Campbell)

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff. 453a-454a.

C – CAUGHT BY REMOVING BRIDLE

F94.C.1 *The Water-Horse of Poll Nan Craobhan*

In bygone days, Poll nan Craobhan, a pool on the river Spey, in Cromdale, was haunted by a water-horse which was the terror of the surrounding country ... he seemed to be the most beautiful horse that man ever beheld. His coat was as black

and glossy as the raven's wing. On his head was a glittering bridle, and on his back a saddle with stirrups of silver...

Near the river Spey lived a man named Little John. Little John usually spent a great part of the year in the Yellow Moss making peats, and on that account he was known over the length and breadth of the parish as Little John of the Yellow Moss... he was as bold and fearless as one of the very Féinn. His thoughts all day and his dreams by nights were of the water horse in Poll nan Craobhan; and many were the fruitless plans he formed for the destruction of the horse. At long last, he thought he would go and consult the black wife of Alnaic ... When he arrived at the hut of the black wife, he knocked at the door, and the answer came out at once: 'Come in, Little John of the Yellow Moss; it is I who am aware what you want; and who knows but you and I may yet put a tether on the black horse of Poll nan Craobhan.'

When John had got enough sowens and sweet milk, the black wife took her divining stone, and looked into it for a long time. At last she lifted up her head, and said: '... Keep up your heart, and there is no fear of you! But this is what you must do: The horse will be feeding on the meadow on Beltane-eve. When the sun begins to descend from its highest point in the sky, you will kill the speckled ox. You will then put the skin about yourself, and go on your hands and feet, like an ox. Before the setting of the sun let someone drive yourself and the cows to the side of Poll nan Craobhan. As soon as the sun sets, the black horse will come up out of the water, and begin feeding with the cattle. As you will look like an ox, the horse will be thrown off his guard. But if you feel or show the least fear, your wife will look for your return in vain. Draw nearer and nearer the river at your leisure, until you get between the horse and the water; and then it will be your own fault if you get not the better of him. The bridle has neither bit nor chin-strap; and therefore, when you get near enough, you will make a spring at the bridle, and pull it off. The black horse is then under your control, and will do whatever you wish, so long as you keep the bridle from him. Be careful of the bridle, or it will be the worse for you. Now, Little John, go your way.'

Little John went home, and waited till the day before Beltane-eve came round. As soon as the sun had crossed his highest point in the sky, he killed the speckled ox. His wife put the skin upon him in such a clever way that the very cows mistook him for the ox that had been killed. Before sunset she drove the cows to the bank of the river, and he followed as best as he could. When the sun went down, the black horse came slowly up out of the pool, and began feeding among the cattle. Said Little John to himself: 'Now, son of my own father, be not afraid', and pretending to be nibbling the grass as he went, he at last got between the horse and the water. Then with a great spring he got hold of the glittering bridle, pulled it off the horse, and caught him by the forelock. 'Ha, Ha! my lad, I have you now', said he. The horse answered: 'You have me now, indeed, Little John of the Yellow Moss; but if you will show me the same kindness as you show to your other animals, I will serve you faithfully day and night, until you give me back my own bridle and saddle by the hand of a maiden; and then I will trouble the country no more.'

'We will see about that', said Little John.

...Little John hid the bridle and the saddle in a secret corner above the kitchen bed. No man was so proud as he; for no horse in the course of Spey could be compared with his beautiful black horse. No road was too rough for him to tread, no load too heavy to carry, no fodder too coarse to eat. With his great sled-cart Little John could

now empty the Yellow Moss of peats quicker than the men of the Clachan could build them into stacks.

He was getting rich, and many came from far and near to buy the black horse; but they were left to return home without him.

Things went on this way with Little John for some years, until one day he and his wife went to a fair at the Clachan of Cromdale, and left their daughter Sheena Vane to look after the house. Sheena Vane used to feed the black horse with her own hand, and ride him to the water; but on this black, evil day, she happened to light upon the bridle and saddle, where they lay concealed.

She thought to herself that now was her chance of having a good long ride on the black horse's back; and away she went with the bridle and the saddle to the stable. When the horse saw his own furniture, he neighed at it with great delight. In a short time he was in harness; but no sooner was Sheena Vane seated on the saddle than away he went with the swiftness of the wind, not to Poll nan Craobhan, but to a Lochan near Clachan of Cromdale. As they were going through Achroisk they were met by Little John and his wife, and the black horse cried out in passing: 'I have now got my bridle and saddle from the hands of a maiden, and I will trouble no man any more.'

The horse and the maiden were seen to plunge headlong into the deepest part of the Lochan, where many believed it had no bottom. That was the last that was seen of Sheena Vane and the water-horse of Poll nan Craobhan... The Lochan is called to this day Bog-an-Loirein; and the place where Little John of the Yellow Moss lived, Dalchapple (Horsefield).

MacDougall 1910: 308-319.

F94.C.2 *The water horse and the maiden (variant)*

There was a loch in the Highlands where they would always see a water-horse. Always when the sun went down in the summer, they would see the horse coming down from the brae of the loch wearing a saddle and bridle, and it would begin to graze amongst the cattle that were out in the nearby glen. There was one clever man in the area, and feared nothing, and he decided that he would try to catch the water-horse, and would keep it in his own stable. The first thing he did was to go and see an old hag who was staying in the village and he told her what he wanted to do. Now, this old woman was famed for her knowledge of such things, and when he told her what he wanted to do: 'Ah,' she said, 'you'll do that if you wish, the first beautiful evening, after the sun has gone down, you will go out to the brae of the loch and you'll put the skin of a cow around you, and you'll start to move around on your arms and legs amongst the cattle as if you yourself were an animal. When it comes and starts to graze, you'll try to catch it as quickly as you can, and when you get the chance you'll grab hold of the bridle. When you get the bridle and saddle you'll ever after be the horse's master.'

This is how it was. The first beautiful evening, the man went out to the glen with the cow skin over his shoulders. When the sun went down, he put the skin across his back and he went crawling amongst the cattle as if he were grazing. It wasn't long at all before he saw the water-horse coming out from the loch. The water-horse began to graze with the cattle. The man creeped as quickly as he could over to the water-horse, waiting for the chance to grab hold of the bridle. All of a sudden the horse came closer to him, and he stood up nimbly and got a grip on the bridle. He caught

the saddle and snatched it from the horse's back. When the horse lost the bridle and the saddle, it had no power left, and it would follow the man anywhere. It asked the man to give the bridle and saddle back, but the man would not do that. 'Then,' said the water-horse to him, 'until I am given the bridle and saddle back by the hand of a maiden, I will be your faithful servant.'

The man went off home, and the water-horse like a lamb after him. His horse stayed with the other horses, and there was nothing that he would have to do which the horse couldn't do for him. It worked very well and in a short time the man was a wealthy man. People were coming from all over to buy the horse, but he would not sell it no matter what he would get for it. His daughter would always feed the horse in the stable, and ride it towards the water. She had no bridle or saddle, for when her father had brought the horse home, he hid the bridle and saddle in a secret place where he thought no one would ever find it. But this day of days, when the man and his wife left the house, the daughter went as usual to feed the horse, and lo and behold she came across the place where the bridle and saddle were hid. She took both and put them on the horse and was going to take it on a trip before her father and mother returned home. When the horse got the bridle and saddle on its back and the daughter was astride it in the saddle, out it went and others saw it go straight for the loch. When it reached the brae it was heard to shout, 'I got my bridle and saddle back by the hand of a maiden, and now she's mine,' and it leapt out, and neither it nor the daughter were ever seen again.

D. J. MacDonald Mss vol 13: 1205-1210.

F94.C.3 *The water-horse's bridle*

We [the author] were talking to an old woman about a man whom we both knew well, and who has been wonderfully successful in life; from very small beginnings having become a person of considerable substance in horses, cattle, and lands. We remarked that it was curious how everything he took in hand seemed to prosper with him. The old lady agreed with us, but observed that what he owed his success to wasn't so much of a mystery after all; that she and some others knew it, and had long known it. We earnestly begged for further enlightenment on the subject, and being somewhat of a favourite with the good old lady, she promised to gratify our curiosity, if we called upon her in the evening, when she should be quite alone. We did call on her in the evening, and when we had shut the door and barred it at her request, she invited us to a seat by the ingle cheek, and in a low voice informed us that the secret of the success in life of the man about whom we had been speaking in the forenoon was that he possessed a water-horse bridle, *srian Eich-Uisge*. 'A water-horse bridle!', we exclaimed, hiding, however, our astonishment and inclination to laugh outright under an assumed air of curiosity. 'Where in the world did he get hold of such a thing?' 'I can tell you about it', she continued. 'His granduncle, who was a drover, was once returning home from a cattle market at Pitlochry, in Perthshire. As he was coming through the Moor of Rannoch the night overtook him, but as it was in autumn time, and the moon rose full and bright behind him, he continued his journey as easily as if it was the clear noonday; and he was, besides, perfectly acquainted with the way, having often travelled it at all seasons. With his stick in his hand, and his plaid over his shoulder, he walked along hastily, without a stop or halt, till he reached *Lochanna Cuile*, where he sat down to refresh himself with some bread and cheese, and a bottle of milk he had got at a shepherd's house on the way; for

Dòmhnull Mòr Dròbhair, as they called him, was a very sober man, and seldom drank whisky. As he sat on a stone by the side of the lake he saw something glittering in the moonlight, which, on taking it up, he found to be a horse bridle. Dòmhnull Mòr carried the bridle home with him, and was surprised next morning to find that the bit and buckle were of pure silver, and the reins of a soft and beautifully speckled sort of leather, such as he had never seen before. What astonished him most was, that on touching the silver bit it felt so hot as to be unbearable. He was very much frightened as well as astonished, and now wished that he had let it lie where he found it. It was only when a 'wise woman' was sent for from a neighbouring glen that the truth became known. She declared it to be a water-horse's bridle, the bit of deep down, subterranean silver still retaining part of the heat which belonged to it in its primeval molten state. The reins, she said, were the skin of *Buarach-Baoibh*, a sort of magical serpents, dreadfully poisonous, that frequent such rivers as are inhabited by the kelpy and water-horse. The 'wise woman' directed the bridle to be hung up on a *cromag* or crook made of rowan tree, which, while permitting free escape for all its beneficial influences, would yet effectually check the radiation of any evil that might be inherent in it. This was done, and from that day forward Dòmhnull Mòr was fortunate and successful in all his undertakings. At his death, having no family of his own, he bequeathed the magic bridle to his grandnephew, the present owner; and this man has been prosperous just because of the possession of a water-horse 'bridle of luck'.' 'But how', we asked, 'do water-horses happen to have bridles? Who could ride or drive them? and if they can neither be driven or ridden, why should they have bridles?' 'Thomas the Rhymer', the old lady replied, 'or some other magician and prophet of the olden time now detained in Fairyland, is destined yet to reappear upon earth with some companions almost as powerful as himself; then shall the water-horses be bridled and saddled by a brave company of Scottish men from Fairyland, some Highland, some Lowland, bridled and saddled, and fearlessly mounted; a great battle will be fought; all Englishmen and other foreigners will be driven out of the country; the crown will again revert to the rightful heirs, and Scotland once again become a free, independent, and happy kingdom!'

Such, in substance, is a very respectable old lady's account of a superstition which, on inquiry, we find to be known, and more or less believed in, everywhere.

Stewart 1885: 42-45.

F94.C.4 *MacGregor and the water horse*

It is told as a matter of belief that if any one secures possession of the bridle of a water horse (each uisge), he will, along with it, obtain power over the horse, and will himself have the strength and fleetness of the horse. The following story illustrates this:

One of the MacGregors had been in the Sgoil Dhubh (Black art school) and had learned all sorts of enchantments there. After his return home, he was one evening standing behind a boulder, by the side of a loch, many miles from his own house. He noticed the water in the loch very much agitated, and at one spot particularly, where it was boiling up like a cauldron. In a minute or two a fine black horse leaped out of the loch, and came prancing along the sand, tossing its mane while its eyes burned like lamps, and from its nostrils it dashed flames of fire. MacGregor knew at once that it was a water horse, and was determined to have its bridle; so by means of his spell he made himself invisible, and when the horse came up to where he was

standing, he made a spring forward, seized the bridle and cut it through with his little axe. In a moment the horse was transformed into the appearance of a great, strong, fierce looking man, and in a voice of thunder he demanded that his bridle should be returned to him at once. But when MacGregor would not give it up, the each uisge said to him: 'you and it will never enter your house together'. With that MacGregor took his heels homewards, and having the bridle in his possession, he was not long in galloping over the ground, for he had obtained the running powers of the horse. All the same, the man was keeping up with him. When he came near to his own house, he saw a window open, and shouted to his wife to catch the bridle, and when he saw that she was ready to catch it, he threw it in by the window, and then went in by the door himself. When the great man saw that MacGregor had the pull of him, and that he had lost his bridle for ever, he raised such a roaring that the house shook, and the hills and rocks echoed back the sound. But from that time no one ever saw the each uisge again.

Maclagan Mss: 3358-3359 (from *Skye Mss 1888*).

F94.C.5 *Mr Macgrigor and the Kelpie*

The following curious relation, communicated to the compiler by the celebrated Mr Wellox, who possesses the precious relic captured from the kelpie alluded to in the story, will complete all the information that is necessary regarding this once formidable entrapper of mankind.

'In the time of my renowned ancestor, Mr James Macgrigor, (rest his soul!) who was well known for being a good man, and a man of great strength and courage in his day, there was a most mischievious water-kelpie that lived in Lochness, and which committed the most atrocious excesses on the defenceless inhabitants of the surrounding districts. It was the common practice of this iniquitous agent to prowl about the public roads, decked out in all the trappings of a riding horse, and, in this disguise, place himself in the way of the passenger, who often took it into his head to mount him to his no small prejudice; for upon this the vicious brute would immediately fly into the air, and in a jiffy light with his rider in Lochnadorb, Lochspynie, or Lochness, where he would enjoy his victim at his leisure. Filled with indignation at the repeated relations he had heard of the kelpie's practices, my ancestor, Mr Macgrigor, ardently wished to fall in with his kelpieship, in order to have a bit of a communing with him touching his notorious practices. And Providence, in its wise economy, thought it meet that Mr Macgrigor should be gratified in his wish.

'One day as he was travelling along 'Slochd Muichd', a wild and solitary pass on the road between Strathspey and Inverness, whom did he observe but this identical water-kelpie, browsing away by the road-side with the greatest complacency, thinking, no doubt, in his mind, that he would kidnap Mr Macgrigor as he had done the others. But in this idea he found himself woefully mistaken! For no sooner did Mr Macgrigor espy him, han he instantly determined to have a trial of his mettle. Accordingly, marching up to the horse, who thought, no doubt, he was just coming to mount him, Mr Macgrigor soon convinced him of the contrary by drawing his trusty sword, with which he dealt the kelpie such a pithy blow on the nose, as almost felled him to the ground. The blow maltreated the kelpie's jaw very considerably, cutting through his bridle, in consequence of which, one of the bits, being that which you have just examined, fell down on the ground. Observing the bit lying at his feet, Mr

Macgrigor had the curiosity to pick it up, whilst the astonished kelpie was recovering from the effects of the blow, and this bit Mr Macgrigor threw carelessly into his pocket. He then prepared for a renewal of his conflict with its former owner, naturally supposing the kelpie would return him his compliment. But what was Mr Macgrigor's surprise, when he found that, instead of retorting his blow, and fighting out the matter to the last, the kelpie commenced a cool dissertation upon the injustice and illegality of Mr Macgrigor's proceedings. 'What is your business with me?' says he. 'What is your business with me, Mr Macgrigor? I have often heard of you as man of great honour and humanity; why therefore, thus abuse a poor defenceless animal like me, let me be a horse, or let me be a kelpie, so long as I did you no harm. In my humble opinion, Mr Macgrigor', continued the kelpie, 'you acted both cruelly and illegally; and certainly your conduct would justify me, if I should return you twofold your assault upon me. However, I abominate quarrels of this sort', says the conciliatory kelpie, 'and if you peaceably return the bit of my bridle, we shall say no more on the subject.' To this learned argument of the kelpie Mr Macgrigor made no other reply, than flatly denying his request in the first place; and, in the second place, mentioning, in pretty unqualified terms, his opinion of his character and profession. 'It is true', replied the other, 'that I am what you call a kelpie; but it is known to my heart, that my profession was never quite congenial to my feelings. We kelpies engage in many disagreeable undertakings. But, as the proverb says, Necessity has no law; and there is no profession that a man or spirit will not sometimes try, for the sake of an honest livelihood, so you will please have the goodness to give me the bit of my bridle'. Observing the great anxiety evinced by the kelpie to have the bit of his bridle restored to him, and feeling anxious to learn its properties, my sagacious ancestor immediately concocted a plan, whereby he might elicit from the poor dupe of a kelpie an account of its virtues. 'Well, Mr Kelpie', says Mr Macgrigor, 'all your logic cannot change my opinion of the criminality of your profession, though, I confess, it has somewhat disarmed me of my personal hostility to you as a member of it; I am therefore, disposed to deliver up to you the bit of your bridle, but it is on the express condition, that you will favour me of an account of its use and qualities, for I am very curious, do you know'. To this proposition the kelpie joyfully acceeded, and thus addressed Mr Macgrigor: 'My dear Sir, you must know that such agents as I are invested by our Royal Master with a particular commission, consisting of some document delivered to us by his own hand. The commission delivered to a kelpie consists in a bridle invested with all those powers of transformation, information, and observation, necessary for our calling; and whenever we lose this commission, whether voluntarily or by accident, our power is at an end, and certain annihilation within four and twenty hours is the consequence. Had it not been that my bridle was broken by your matchless blow, I must be so candid as to declare, I might have broken every bone in your body; but now you are stronger than myself, and you can be half a kelpie at your pleasure – only please to look through the holes of the bit of the bridle, and you will see myriads of invisible agents, fairies, witches and devils, all flying around you, the same as if you had been gifted with second sight, and all their machinations clearly exposed to your observation.' 'My dear Sir', replied my ancestor, 'I am much obliged to you for your information; but I am sorry to inform you, that your relation has so endeared me the bit of your bridle to myself, that I have resolved to keep it for your sake. I could not persuade to part with it for any consideration whatever.' 'What!' exclaimed the petrified Kelpie, 'do you really

mean, in the face of our solemn agreement, to retain the bit of my bridle?' 'I not only mean it, but I am resolved on it', replies my ancestor, who immediately proceeded to make the best of his way home with the bit. 'Come, come', the Kelpie would perpetually exclaim, 'you have carried the joke far enough, you surely do not mean to keep my bridle?' 'Time will show', was always his laconic answer. The Kelpie still continued his earnest entreaties, interlarded with anecdotes of great squabbles which he had formerly had with as powerful characters as Mr Macgrigor, and which always ended to his eminent advantage, but which, he politely insinuated, he would be sorry to see repeated. But when his grief and solicitude for his bridle began to evince themselves in a threatening aspect, a single flourish of this trusty sword disarmed him of all his might, and made him calm as a cat. At length, when they arrived in sight of Mr Macgrigor's house, his grief and despair for his bridle became perfectly outrageous. Galloping off before Mr Macgrigor, the Kelpie told him, as he went, that he and the bit should never pass his threshold together; and, in pursuance of this assurance, he planted himself in Mr Macgrigor's door, summoning up all his powers for the impending conflict. However, James Macgrigor resolved, if possible, to evade the Kelpie's decree; and accordingly going to a back window on his house, he called his wife towards him, and threw the bit of the Kelpie's bridle into her lap. He then returned to the Kelpie, who stood sentry at his door, and told him candidly he was a miserable legislator; for that, in spite of his decree, the bit of his bridle was that moment in his wife's possession. The Kelpie now finding himself fairly outwitted, saw the vanity of contending with James Macgrigor and his claymore, for what could not be recovered. As there was a rowan cross above the door, his kelpieship would no more enter the house than he could pass through the eye of a needle; and he, therefore, thought it best to take himself off, holding forth, at the same time, the most beastly language to my ancestor, which he most sincerely despised.'

Stewart 1823: 149-157.

F94.C.6 *The Loch Ness water horse*

The reciter says that he has heard frequently of the Each Uisge in his native island of Lewis, where it was believed that it had a great fondness for human blood; and that it had the power to transform itself into the form of a man, which it often did with the view of being able to secure its victims. The form which it usually assumed, was that of a handsome young man, and then it would try to insinuate itself into the favour of women, win their affections if it could, and then carry them off to its haunts, where it would drink their blood. Another of its methods for obtaining victims was to graze by the road side, as if it were an ordinary horse, with a bridle on its head. On these occasions it would allow anyone to come near it, and would even entice them, except that it always appeared to be suspicious about its bridle. If any tired traveller were so foolish as to get on his back, no sooner had he mounted than off the horse went at full speed for its loch, where it would feast on its rider's blood. It was believed that all its power was in its bridle, and that if one suceeded in getting this stripped off his head, his power for mischief was gone.

The reciter used to hear the following story told of a man who was at one time living in Inverness Shire, near the line of the present Caledonian Canal. This man, it is said, was a very good man, and he was also unusually strong. At that time there was an each uisge haunting about there that was doing a lot of harm, and people were

very much afraid of it. Some stories about the ravages it was making having reached this man's ears, he vowed that he would put a stop to it, if he could. One day, shortly after that, he was on his way home, and when he came near Lochness, he saw a fine looking horse, with a splendid bridle, grazing at the road side. The man was foot sore and wearied, having walked a long way, but knowing something of the pranks of the each uisge, he suspected that this was he. The horse came up close to him, and began to fawn on him, but instead of going on its back, the man lifted his stick, and having struck a smart blow, broke the bit, and the bridle fell to the ground. The man picked it up. The horse then spoke to him, and threatened him, if he would take its bridle away. It pleaded to have it returned, but no, the man held firm, and made for home, as fast as he could run, taking the bridle with him. The horse also ran, and going before the man, took up its stand at the door in a threatening attitude; but the man was wiser than to face him there, so he ran round the house, and threw bit and bridle in by the window; and when the horse saw that he was beat, he vanished in a flame of fire.

Maclagan Mss: 5095-5097 (from Mr Angus Maciver, Back, Lewis).

F94.C.7 *The Laird of Sgoirebreac and the each-uisge*

[Summary] The Laird of Sgoirebreac used to plough with the each-uisge. He had particular words that he would use and then take the reins off the each-uisge. Following an incident with one of his servants and the each-uisge, he would no longer plough with it. The each-uisge continued to come to the house and seek his attention.

SA1955.138.3 (from Mrs Kate Beaton, Portree, Skye; recorded by J. MacInnes).

D – LEFT ALONE

F94.D.1 *Water kelpie in Badenoch*

Personally we have been assured of the existence, even in these modern days of trains and telegraph, of this water-horse. We know a man – he is of a family famous for their supernatural visions and second sights – who went one snowy night to a wood near where he lived; it was a plantation beside Tromie Bridge, in Badenoch, a rather wild place, and one famous for its bogles. The snow was lying deep on the ground. He had felled a tree for firewood, though this was quite contrary to the laws of the estate. He was just rolling it on to the road, when he saw in the middle of the road a horse ready caparisoned for the purpose of sledging home firewood, with traces and everything complete. He could not understand it, and was for a while fixed to the spot with wonder and alarm. But soon it flashed upon him that this was the water-kelpie, and breathing a fervent invocation to the Holy Trinity, he hastened from the place leaving the tree behind him.

The foregoing incident is a pure matter of fact. We may explain it according to our taste or knowledge.

'Tales of the Water Kelpie', 1886-1887: 512.

F94.D.2 *Day of death*

Cruloch is a lonely little lake above Ardachyle in the northeast of Mull. A man passing it late one night, saw a horse with a saddle on it, feeding at the side of the loch. He went to it with the intention of riding it home, but observed green water-

herbs about its feet and refrained from touching it. He walked on and soon was overtaken by the water-horse, in the form of a man, who said unless he was friendly and a well-wisher he would have taken it to the loch. It informed the man of the day of its death.

Maclean 1923: 163.

F94.D.3 *Seeing the Water-horse.*

C.McL. The little lochs where the water-horse lived.

D.McI. Yes ... (explains that his mother believed in the water-horse but his father did not) ... I heard a little about it. There was Hector the Smith. It would come out of ... it would come out in the shape of anything, in the shape of water, in the shape of a beautiful horse-beast, or anything, the water-horse they would call it. I heard my mother saying one time, Hector the Smith, you know the people well, Clan Hector the Smith, from Barra; he was walking, and it's a great distance from end to end of Uist, a long distance. When he reached Clachan Loch Ullaidh, what did he see but a big beautiful horse sitting there on the side of the main road with a saddle on its back, a saddle on the horse.

Well now they said, as I heard, that Hector didn't approach the horse, he would have nothing to do with it. It is said that if he were to straddle the horse that was there, he would follow it to Hell. But Hector didn't approach the horse, he understood what it was, and he kept on his two feet all the rest of his journey. But they believed in the water-horse as surely as I'm talking to you here and now, they believed in it. And my mother believed in the water-horse as surely as God sits in his throne.

C.McL. Would it go out in the shape of a man?

D.McI. It would go out in any shape, in a man's shape. The water-horse would come home to you here if a little girl were here, it would come here looking for her.

SA1952.146.A3 (from Donald MacIntyre; South Uist; recorded by C. MacLean).

F94.D.4 *News of the water-horse*

John son of Duncan was walking in Stoneybridge, and he went about this time over to Snishival, taking the quick road across the little blue-green burn. It was late at night and when he was just going across the stream he heard a loud, terrible rattling sound coming up the side of the facing brae. He stood a while listening and in a short time this great gray horse came up to him and he ran away (lit: he struck his two feet under him front-wise). Now John son of Duncan had no idea what he would do. The beast was very near and the situation did not look good. But he turned and looked around to find something that he could hit with. He found a nearby stone and he bent to pick it up for to draw against the horse, but when he righted himself, the horse turned and fled with the same sudden clamour that it had made when it appeared, and it drew back to Loch nam Clach Geala and was gone from sight. Now after it had gone, John son of Duncan thought that it had not been a horse at all – out and about at that time of night, and in any case it could not gallop the way it did through that kind of area because it was so dangerous with peat-bogs – and that's when he realised that it was the water-horse that he'd seen. He kept on to Snishival anyway, but didn't see anything more.

D. J. MacDonald Mss vol 1: 20.

F94.D.5 *On the road to Iochdar*

Once Hector son of John the Smith was away to Gearraidh-bhailteas and going to walk to Iochdar. When he had made a short way down the road, he grew tired and he said to himself that it was a shame that he had no horse and that it would be long before he makes the distance to Iochdar. Hardly had the words left his lips when the grizzled gray horse appeared and lay down on the main road with its back to him, in order that he may climb on. But Hector did not go near it, and he went past it, and reached Iochdar, and the horse did not trouble him any more.

D. J. MacDonald Mss vol 1: 22.

F94.D.6 *A tale of the water-horse*

There was a man yon time who lived on the white beach in Uist and his horses would always be out on the machair all day, and he would bring them home when the night came. This particular evening he went to collect the horses and it was getting a little wet. He got them a ways up the machair and he began to gather them but he was surprised at how they became upset and skittish, when they were usually so at ease. No matter though, he got them near the house ... After a long time he got them to the door (gates of the stable?) and they proceeded to go inside, and it was then that he noticed that an animal was amongst them which usually was not, and which did not belong to him. He noticed that it had seaweed from the loch at the base of its tail. He realised in a moment what sort of beast he had, and he turned around and was going to draw the stick he had in his fist upon the horse, but in the blink of an eye he saw the horse go away in a ball of fire down to Loch Ollaimh and disappeared out of sight in the middle of the loch, and nothing of the horse was ever seen again.

D. J. MacDonald Mss vol 2: 126-127.

F94.D.7 *The itinerant animal*

People in Uist would always be seeing the water-horse. And the view of most is that it was an evil spirit in the shape of a horse. It would be seen on land and out in the little lochs. It would also be seen amongst the other horses, when they would be let free at the end of autumn. It seems that there was a man in Stoneybridge and when he was bringing his own horses home, he noticed this sleek black beast amongst them. He recognised well enough that this horse-beast did not belong to him, but since it was following the horses he went and brought it home and into his own stables along with his own horses. But after he'd gone into his house, he felt the horses stirring and becoming upset. He came back out and they were there, his own horses, climbing the walls as if they were frightened. He saw the other beast, and it was staying as still as you could imagine at the back of an enclosure in which he'd been placed.

But this time he considered more carefully the itinerant animal, and he saw that it had seaweed tangled in its mane and tail. He realised too well now how it was, and that it was a water-horse that he had. Though he was afraid, he went over and led the horse out of the enclosure and let it out of the stable. And when the horse got out, it sprang away, and whatever way it went it was never seen again. But as soon as the horse left the stable, the man's horses remained timid enough.

D. J. MacDonald Mss vol. 49: 4637-4642.

F94.D.8 *Pony of Lochboisdale*

There was another man who once came to Lochboisdale on foot. There was no other way for travelling in Uist at that time anyway than by foot or by pony. This man was coming up the road, anyway, and night fell. He grew tired and there was still far to go before he would reach the house. And he said to himself, 'Ah,' he said, 'it's a shame I don't have a pony, and indeed I wouldn't be long reaching the house if it weren't for always walking.' He had hardly let the words out of his mouth when along came the beautiful black horse that it was, and it stood on its side on the main road, and it even bore a saddle and stirrups.

Now, though the walker was very tired, and sorely tempted, he would have nothing to do with the horse, but kept straight on walking like before. The horse kept walking down by his side, and rubbing its head against the shoulders of the walker; but in spite of that, the walker's fear kept him from laying a finger on it. At last, the horse began to lay down in front of him on the road, and at times it was difficult for him to get past, but he wouldn't touch it at all because he knew full well that it was the water-horse. He understood also that it was because he himself had wished the horse in his mind that the water-horse had appeared, since the old people would always be reproaching against any wish made at night. When such was done they would say: 'Neither day nor night is a wish fulfilled' or 'To wish is to sin'. In any case, this walker kept walking until he arrived safe and sound, and it was only when he'd reached his house that the horse parted with him.

D. J. MacDonald Mss vol. 49: 4637-4642.

F94.D.9 *The Water-horse*

There was a great belief in the water-horse here since the old times. It would be seen in lochs; it would be seen throughout the land encountering people; it would be seen as a big ruddy-coloured horse, and would also be seen as a young colt. But there's a tidbit of something a man once told me, I think it's about 30 years since he was telling me. He saw it himself. It was Donald MacLachlan, Donald son of Lachlainn son of the Tailor. And this is how he saw it: his sister Peggy left the shop of Calum son of Alasdair in Baile a' Mhanaich on a night at the end of autumn. She was late coming home and he went to meet her. And when he went up the croft and to the main road of the country he saw a horse approaching. He said to himself, 'It's MacCormack's horse, this is, and it's got out. Wouldn't it be well for me to take and ride it, as I'm getting a little tired, until I meet her, and I'll leave it at the house when I return.' He approached the horse. And when he was just putting an elbow on it he noticed that there were scales on the horse, that it wasn't (fur?) at all but as if they were the scales of fish. And at the same time the horse turned, and he saw its eyes, something in its eyes that was natural and human-like looking back and considering him. He blessed and crossed himself and took to the road, and peered behind him, and he saw the horse keeping up along side.

SA1964.55.A1 (from D. A. MacEachan, Benbecula; recorded by D. A. MacDonald).

F94.D.10 *Waterhorse disappears after being sold at the market*

C: Oh, there would be stories about a thing they call the water-horse as well ...

E: The water-horse. Yes. I myself have heard mention of a water-horse that was here in this loch. There was a man going away riding and he had a horse with him. And when – it was only an old lump of a horse. And when they were going past, the

water-horse came out of this loch and went for the old horse that he had and killed it. He went away with the horse – the big elegant horse that came out of the loch and he sold it in Bowmore. And after he was sold, the horse disappeared, and the horse was never seen again.

SA1953.136.A16 (from Ewen [Hugh] Currie, Ardnahoe, Islay; recorded by C. I. MacLean).

F94.D.11 *Horse taken in with others; gone in the morning*

My great grandfather ... that's a great grandfather, he was a great grandfather anyway, I don't know what it was. They were at the thatched house, at the back of the house, bringing in the laird's horses. There were sitting there when the work was done. They were away from the house for as long as a year, until they were needed again, at the beginning of winter. And my ... here, they were away ... and night fell. And he got a horse at the end ... I don't know the name of the loch ... but at the end of the loch, and he put the tack on the horse and brought it into the barn where he would spend the night. And when he rose in the morning, there was no sign of the horse. Flotsam from the loch ... It was the water-horse that he had. Flotsam from the loch was on the horse's tack. And they say that it was the oatcakes and tobacco he had in his pocket that saved his life.

SA1953.127.7 (from Mrs Shaw, Jura; recorded by C. I. MacLean).

F112. Wish for Female Company

*B – HORSE FAIRY (KELPIE)

F112.B.1 *The piper and the ladies*

Thirteen men – the number must be noted – were walking through the hills, when they came to an old bothy. They quickly lighted a fire and were pretty well on with festivities and drinking. The idea of dancing seized hold of their minds, and as one of them was a piper, they all expressed their sorrow that they hadn't their girls there. No sooner said than thirteen beautiful ladies trooped in, and they set to dancing. The piper, who had the opportunity of surveying the scene, saw that each of the women had hoofs instead of feet. He at once understood the danger, and determined to make good his own escape at least. He told his ladylove that he wanted to go out for a minute, but she would not allow him. He took off his belt and told her to keep hold of the end of it, while he would hold the other outside the door. This she agreed to. He pinned the belt to the door-post and ran. He came to some horses and mounted the first he got hold of, but it threw him, for it was a mare. He mounted a second and it threw him also, for the same reason. By good luck, the third was a horse, and he was scarcely on its back when the fairy woman was at his side. But the noble animal succeeded in taking its rider out of danger, and next day, when the men sent to the rescue arrived at the bothy, they found only the 'sgamhan' (lights) portions of the bodies of the unfortunate dozen.

'Tales of the Water Kelpie', 1886-1887: 513.

F112.B.2 *The horse-fairy of Dalnaguillin*

At a place called Dalnaguillin there is a bothy for the farm-servants. While they were dancing one night to the strains of the bagpipes, a woman dressed in white entered and joined in the dance. While she was dancing, the piper notices that it was hoofs she had instead of feet; so he thought that the sooner he was out of there the better. He accordingly asked them to excuse him, as he was going to the door for a minute. The woman, however, would not consent unless she held one end of his plaid. Having reached the door he threw off his plaid, and bolted. The woman followed him, but as he was a good runner he soon outdistanced her and so got rid of her for that night. The day, however, as he was returning from work, a colt suddenly appeared on the road and went on in front of him, always keeping the same distance from him. They went on in this way until they came to the mouth of a cave into which the colt disappeared. Immediately afterwards it emerged as the woman of the previous night, and she began to dance wildly about for a few minutes; then she disappeared into the cave again. The piper took some men with him next day but could find no trace of anything.

Nicholson (ed.) 1897: 15-16.

***F135. Waterhorse Attacks:**

A – GIRLS IN SHIELING

F135.A.1 *Mother's Shealing*

Three girls were tarrying in this shealing. Three water-horses came towards them in the form of three handsome young men. They stayed in the shealing through the night. At midnight two of them killed two of the girls. The third of them escaped. One of the water-horses ran after her, and as he ran he yelled. 'That wasn't the happy shealing, but the dark and terrible shealing. You ate your own power, and my power left me.'

The girl escaped with her life. The mother of the girl speaks of the place to this day. The mother of the maiden.

CW 5, f. 25 (cf. CW 108, f. 42).

F135.A.2 *Airidh Mhuthair (variant)*

Same as 'Airidh Mhuthair' above, except in this version the third water-horse/young man yells to the fleeing third girl,

It's not the dark and terrible shealing
You ate your ... and your power
And me, my own power left me.

CW 108, f. 42 (A. Carmichael – cf. CW 5, f.25)

F135.A.3 *Shieling of the one night*

In a fertile glen not far distant from the village of Shawbost, in the west of Lewis, there lies a shieling that for more than a century has gone by a Gaelic name meaning the Shieling of the One Night... One evening in June, just at the commencement of shieling-time, two cousins in their early twenties, known locally as Fair Mary and Dark Mary, occupied the shieling for the first time since its erection. Having milked their cows and put in a spell at the churning, they sat in the low doorway of their summer dwelling, singing and knitting until the hour for retiring.

As they were putting a light on the cruisie, there came to the shieling a woman, on whom they had no acquaintance. She professed weariness of body and mind, and asked a night's hospitality. There seemed nothing unusual about her mein, since she was clad in the customary dress of the Lewis peasant woman, and spoke with such intimacy of the neighbouring countryside that the two Maries saw no reason to deny her the traditional hospitality of the Isles.

... After a simple repast, the Maries and their guest retired for the night. At dawn of day, however, Dark Mary awoke with a fright, and felt a warm trickle by her side. Up she leapt in great horror to discover the guest gone, and a stream of blood flowing from the breast of her cousin, who now was dead.

On forcing open the rude doorway of the shieling, she noticed a horse trotting away and away toward the greying of the day. No explanation seemed necessary now. The horse was nothing more or less than the dreaded *each-uisge*, or water-horse, to which she and her dead cousin, Fair Mary, had unwittingly offered hospitality the previous evening, believing her to have been a woman, footsore, and genuinely seeking a night's portion...'

MacGregor 1937: 67-68.

F135.A.4 *Each uisge in the parish of Carloway (Lewis)*

The reciter, who is a native of Lewis says that belief in the existence of Eich Uisge is very common among the people of that island, and that there are few fresh water lochs on the island that are not spoken of as having had their each uisge. The water horses were supposed to be able to transform themselves into the appearance of men and were mischieviously inclined, especially in the way of misleading young women. Some people had the idea that the each uisge was the evil one himself in that form, and not a mere creature. The reciter tells a story which he has often heard. The story is as follows:

In a beautiful strath, in the parish of Carloway, there is a grave pointed out which is said to be the grave of a young girl who was at one time murdered by an each uisge. The story is that this girl and a companion were away together at the sheiling attending to their cattle. Late one night a traveller came the way, who asked them if he might remain with them over the night, as he was feeling tired, and could not go further that night. There was, as is always the case, only one apartment in the sheiling; and in this apartment there was only one bed: it was the bed on which the two girls slept. But there was a bench by the bed side, which was made of turf, covered with bent. The girls explained to the traveller that they had no place to put him but where they sat, and no bed except this bench, but if that would satisfy him, he might rest there over the night. The stranger declared that he would be quite satisfied with that, and accordingly made for remaining there over the night. Soon they all went to rest, and the girls fell asleep, but some time about midnight the girl that slept on the back side of the bed having out her hand was startled at feeling her companion wet with something warm. Having got up, she found that the stranger had gone, and when she got a light, she found her companion bathed in blood. She had been murdered. She rushed out for the purpose of following the stranger, and seeing him a short distance away, she ran after him, but when he saw her coming, he transformed himself into a horse, and plunging into the loch went out of her sight in a moment. She then knew that it had not been a man at all, but a water horse. The girl that was murdered was buried just where she met with her death, where her grave is still to be seen. The reciter has often seen it.

Maclagan Mss: 3352-3354 (from M. Morrison, Portcharlotte, Islay).

F135.A.5 *The water-horse in Bracadale*

The Bracadale district of Skye boasted at least one water-horse. The maidens, who used to attend the old-time shieling up on the slopes of the Shadowy Hill, in Trotternish, had rather an uncomfortable experience. At nightfall they had lain down to rest on their big bed of heather and bracken; and, just as they were falling asleep, they heard a voice without, saying: '*Leigibh an stigh mi, a chloinn gaolach*! Let me in, you beloved children!' And the maiden who rose to answer the stranger at the door, was then asked by a feeble and worn creature: '*C'aite an cadail cailleachag an nochd?* Where will sleep the little old woman to-night?'

'She will sleep at the feet of the maidens', replied the shieling lassie who let her in.

'Oh, but the beast of the feet will take hold of me!' answered the frail woman. When she was offered a place behind the maidens, she replied that she was equally terrified of the beast that haunted the back of the bed. As there remained no alternative, the old woman was alloted a place in the centre of the *leapa mhor na h-*

airidh – in the centre of the big, shieling bed; and ere long heavy sleep was on all its tired occupants.

But the maiden nearest to the door of the shieling bothy was conscious that the frail woman was suspiciously restless, and that she slept very spasmodically. Soon she felt the old woman crawling toward her; and on turning round, she observed that she had her teeth in the arm of the maiden lying next to her.

What was the old woman but the water-horse in disguise!

Up the observant maiden rose, and fled as quickly as her legs could bear her. But this ugly creature pursued her with a terrific shrieking, having now assumed his true form. Eventually they came to a little stream that to this day runs between Totarder and Balgowan, and in the locality of Bracadale church. Over the stream leapt the terror-stricken maiden, just as the cock began to crow in Balgowan, the Smith's Hamlet. Now, this cock's crowing meant the saving of the girl's life, since it acted as a spell on the enraged water-horse, who thus was hindered from crossing the stream. In this wise the maiden escaped to her home; but the water-horse cried after her: '*Duilich e, duilich e, alltan!* Sad it is, sad it is, streamlet!'

And to this day the little stream flowing by the church of Bracadale goes by the name of *Alltan duilich*, the Difficult Streamlet.

MacGregor 1937: 74-75.

F135.A.6 *Kelpies*

In the West Highlands of Scotland, there are numerous stories about the 'Kelpies', 'Brownies' or 'Water fairies'. These fairies had the power to assume any form they wished. The following is a story about them: – In the last century it was the habit of farmers who had large hill farms to have a kind of byre up in the hills to which they sent some dairy-maids to look after the dairy-produce. In Skye there was a byre of this sort or shealing belonging to a farmer, up among the Cuchullin hills in which were seven girls. One night after they had gone to bed they heard a knock at the door and on opening it they saw an old woman outside who begged to be allowed in, as the night was very stormy. The girls allowed her in and when they went to bed again they told the old woman to lie at the foot of the bed (they all slept in one bed). She said she was afraid to do this so after a number of complaints they at last allowed her in between themselves. Through the night the youngest of the girls was awakened by a peculiar gurgling noise. She looked round and saw the old woman cut the throat of the girl who was next to the wall and suck the blood. She saw her do this to six of them (she was at the front of the bed) and just as the old woman was going to catch her, she sprang out of bed and opening the door she ran off towards home. The old woman followed her till she reached a stream across which she jumped and just as the old woman was going to do the same, a cock crew and she giving a yell resumed her right shape (for she was a Kelpie) and plunging into the stream it said that it was sorry at not catching the girl. The stream has been called ever since the 'Allt duilich'. The girl ran on to the nearest house but as soon as she crossed the threshold she fell down dead. Soon after this the farmer pulled down the shealing but since then not one blade of grass has grown on the place where the shealing had been.

This story like many others can easily be proved to be untrue for nobody was told what happened as the girl did not live to tell it and thus the greater part of it must have been made up by someone with a vivid imagination.

CW 88, item q, ff. 29-30 (from Hugh Tolmie).

F135.A.7 *The last each-uisge of Lewis*

This is how the last each-uisge that was in Lewis came to his end: A man lived in Erista, in the parish of Uig, who was the tenant tacksman not only of that and the neighbouring village but of the extensive tract of land between Loch Roag and Loch Langabhat. In the summer season he used to send his cattle to graze on the moor with two females to look after them. The women lived in a shieling in Glen Langabhat – where the ruins of the shieling are still to be seen.

The women were frequently visited by the each-uisge in human form, but as he conducted himself in no way disagreeably they did not feel any repugnance to his visits. In the course of time, however, he seems to have undergone a change of disposition, inasmuch as his conduct towards them became highly offensive. He not only insulted and ill-treated themselves, but committed great depredations among their master's cattle – killing some of them on the spot and carrying some of them away. But, says my informant, he always had the form of a quadruped when he killed them on the spot, but of a man when taking them away and visiting the women. His indignities towards the women and his depredations amongst the cattle increased to such an extent that the women left the field to himself, and made their way to Erista, where they told their master how matters stood. Their master, not believing their reports, and deriding their cowardice, sent two 'sgallag's' to the moors to see what was the real state of matters. When the 'sgallag's' came in sight of Glen Shanndaig they saw the each-uisge in the act of taking one of the cattle away. This satisfied them, and they returned and told their master what they had seen. The owner of the cattle saw that he must get the each-uisge killed or else his cattle would be all lost to him. There was a man in Eashadir on the shores of Loch Roag who was a famous archer and who had killed some time before two each-uisge's, one in Skye and another in the parish of Lochs (Lewis). To him, then, the owner of the cattle went and offered him a great reward if he could kill the each-uisge.

The archer, whose name was Macleod, agreed to go at once. He accordingly took his bow and his arrows and started for the glen, accompanied by his son, who did not know where they were bound for till they were half-way on their journey.

When the son heard the object of the journey he would not by any means go, but wished to return home and let his father go alone. The father would not permit this, but bound his son with cords and left him there.

Macleod proceeded alone on his way, and when he came in sight of the glen he saw the each-uisge coming up from the loch and making for him. He held himself in readiness, and when the beast was within range he let fly the arrow, which stuck in the creature's side, but did not in the least impede his progress. As he came still nearer, the man let go a second arrow, which caused the each-uisge to stagger, but still it came on with his mouth wide open and his eyes glaring. The man saw he was in danger and took out the Baobhag, the Fury of the Quiver, and placing it waited till the creature was near, when he fired it so that it went in at its mouth and through its heart. The beast fell dead, and Macleod cut off its tail as a pledge that he had killed the each-uisge, and picking up the Baobhag returned to the tacksman, who rewarded him generously.

'Fairy Tales, etc.', 1908-1909: 166-168.

F135.A.8 *Each Uisge in the form of a poor woman*

Four or five centuries back, in the time of young William Kenneth MacQuen's great grandfather, a waterhorse alias each uisge came in the form of a poor woman to one of the sheilings beyond Carloway. Three young girls were asleep when she arrived and said [Gaelic] 'where shall the old woman sleep?' One of the girls said 'the old woman may sleep next the wall'. She answered 'Ichidh beast a bhalla cailachag schanich cailachag beast a bhalla', so she was allowed to sleep in the middle but soon thereafter went in its usual form and commenced eating the girl next to him. The other two galloped off home towards the houses but he devoured the second one ... And the third and the only survivor arrived and gave the alarm. MacQuen the Tacksman went out with a large musket that would hit a clam shell in ten hundred yards, fired at the monster but though within hundred yards, the ball which struck opposite the heart near went through the pile. Reloaded and put a piece of silver to lace the ball, fired and finished the monster.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: f. 75a (story 5th)

F135.A.9 *An t-Each Uisge*

Long ago, before sheep were so general as they are now, the hills were covered with deer and black cattle. In the summer season, the milking cows and their calves were sent far away among the hills and pretty quiet glens, where the women who lived in huts called sheiling attended them. There were four young maidens from Bracadale in a sheiling up in Totanden [?] near Loch Lutag. One night when they had taken their supper and were going to sleep, a little old woman came in and sat by the fire. She began to say in a pitiful tone of voice 'where shall the poor old woman sleep tonight?' The young ones said 'she will be at the white soft feet of the maidens'. 'Where shall the poor little old woman sleep tonight?' 'At the front of the bed beside the young maidens'. 'Where shall the poor little old woman lie tonight?' 'At the back of the bed beside the young maidens'. 'Where shall the little old woman lie tonight?' 'In the midst of the young maidens', they all said at once. Then she agreed and they all went to sleep. But the girl who lay in front could not sleep, and she felt disturbed in her mind. At length she sat up, and there were all her companions with their throats cut and the each uisge, or Horse of the Water, in the form of an old woman, sucking their blood. Terror-stricken, she rushed out of the house and flew over the room in the direction of home. The each uisge pursued and nearly overtook her at the burn between Bracadale and Potarden, but the girl leaped over the stream which was wide there and was soon beyond pursuit. When the each uisge came to the same spot, he said 'Difficult is the streamlet' and returned to his abode. The stream is called 'the stream of difficulty' to this day. The young girl barely reached home when she fell down dead from terror and exhaustion. Her home was a little above the Manse garden and to day the place is marked by two large peat stacks. No reason can be given for the each uisge's not having crossed the burn after the maiden.

Campbell Mss: ff. 221a-223b (from Miss MacLeod of MacLeod, January 1859).

B – MEN: WATERHORSE IS SUBDUED OR KILLED

F135.B1 *Smith kills water horse*

The same writer [writing in the *People's friend*, July 26, 1899] tells another story of a smith whose smithy was near a loch in Argyleshire, that was frequented by a

water horse. Between the lights one evening, while the smith was heating an iron in the fire, he glanced out at the window, and to his horror, he saw the water horse coming towards the smithy. What was he to do? Before he had time to do anything, the monster was head and shoulders inside the door; and the smith, when he saw its wide open jaws, with the foam running down from them on the floor, did the only thing he could do to save himself. He took the hot iron out of the fire, and threw it into the brute's wide open mouth, and down its throat. It raged, and howled, and rushed out, and was seen no more. The writer says that the stories are still being told and believed in parts of Argyleshire, and the West Highlands.

Maclagan Mss: 5787 (from Mr N. Morrison, a native of Carloway, Lewis).

F135.B.2 *The smith and the water horse*

A Mull man, speaking of water horses, said that he had heard often of them, but was doubtful whether there was really such a thing in it. He heard of one that was in a loch somewhere, and was doing a great deal of mischief, carrying people into the loch, and drowning them. At last a blacksmith that was there said that he would try him, and on the horse's back he got. As usual, as soon as the horse found a person on his back, he made for the loch, but whatever way the smith had of it, the horse could not take him to the loch. Then it made for the smithy door, and the people thought the smith's brains would be knocked out against the upper lintle of the door, but somehow, the smith prevented that also. And from one thing to another until at last the horse was quite done out, and subdued, and from that day there never were any more lives lost there by that water horse.

Maclagan Mss: 7685-7686 (from Mr Macdougall, Dervaig, Mull).

F135.B3 *Water horse in Loch Moine (Harris)*

Water horses used to be very numerous on the fresh water lochs of Harris. They were different from the Sea horse. There is one loch there called Loch Moine which was said to be haunted by them, and there is a story told of a man who was living near this loch, who, when coming home one night late, discovered that he was being followed by the each-uisge. He made hard for his own house, and having reached it before the each-uisge overtook him, he shut the door and bolted it. The horse was not satisfied, but kept striking against the door. When the man saw that, he got irons heated in the fire, and having them ready, he watched for an opportunity, and when the horse came against the door again, he pushed the red-hot irons through the door, and into the horse's chest. This put an end to it. It managed to drag itself away from the door a little bit – about a quarter of a mile, where it died, and the place is still pointed out there.

Maclagan Mss: 2421-2422.

F138. 'The Hour Has Come but not the Man (cf. ML4050: River Claiming its Due)

A – WATERHORSE

F138.A.1 *The doomed rider*

A party o' Highlanders were busily engaged, a'e day in harvest, in cutting down the corn o' that field; an' just aboot noon, when the sun shone brightest an' they were busiest in the work, they heard a voice frae the river exclaim, 'The hour but not the man has come'. Sure enough, on looking round, there was the kelpie stan'in' in what they ca' a fause ford, just fornent the auld kirk. There is a deep black pool baith aboon an' below, but i' the ford there's a bonny ripple, that shows, as ane might think, but little depth of water; an' just i' the middle o' that, in a place where a horse might swim, stood the kelpie. An' it again repeated its words, 'The hour but not the man has come', an' then flashing through the water like a drake, it disappeared in the lower pool. When the folk stood wondering what the creature might mean, they saw a man on horseback come spurring down the hill in hot haste, making straight for the fause ford. They could then understand her words at ance; an' four o' the stoutest o' them sprang oot frae amang the corn to warn him o' his danger, an' keep him back. An' sae they tauld him what they had seen an' heard, an' urged him either to turn back an' tak' anither road, or stay for an hour or sae where he was. But he just wadna hear them, for he was baith unbelieving an' in haste, an' wauld hae taen the ford for a' they could say, hadna the Highlanders, determined on saving him whether he would or no, gathered round him an' pulled him frae his horse an' then, to mak' sure of him, locked him up in the auld kirk. Weel, when the hour had gone by – the fatal hour o' the kelpie – they flun open the door, an' cried to him that he might noo gang on his journey. Ah! but there was nae answer, though; an' sae they cried a second time, an' there was nae answer still; and then they went in, an' found him lying stiff an' cauld on the floor, wi' his face buried in the water o' the very stone trough that we still see amang the ruins. His hour had come, an' he had fallen in a fit, as 't would seem, head-foremost amang the water o' the trough, where he had been smothered – an' sae ye see, the prophecy o' the kelpie availed naething.

Miller 1889 [1862]: 220-221.

The same story exists, *verbatim*, in Douglas (1893: 148-149).

F138.A.2 *Water Kelpie of An Stair Ghorach*

Near the western boundary of Killiechassie is a spot called 'An Stair Ghorach'. There is a ford on the Tay there, and the Water Kelpie that haunted the crossing cried aloud prior to a death by drowning: 'Thainig an wair, ach cha d'thainig an duine.' (The hour has come but not the man). Invariably after this cry someone was drowned in the ford.

Kennedy 1927: 42.

F138.A.3 *Thàinig an uair is cha d'thàinig an duine*

[Summary] Shepherd sheltering from rain under rock beside river hears voice saying 'Thàinig an uair is cha d'thàinig an duine'. Can see nobody. Then sees man hurrying towards him; man says he must cross the river; the shepherd eventually

dissuades him from trying to cross; man says he is thirsty and must have a drink from the river – he chokes on the first mouthful.

SA1960.21.B4 (from Alan Currie, South Uist; recorded by C. I. MacLean).

F138.A.4 *The Hour and the Man*

Some workmen, trenching by the side of a dyke in Sutherland, long long ago, heard one day, an unearthly voice cry 'The hour is come but not the man'. Half an hour later, they descried a man running at full speed, as if with the intention of crossing the stream. One of them started off, to try and intercept him, because the river was then in 'speate' or spate', and he was very likely from his haste to plunge in without noticing how heavily it was running. The man, a stranger, seemed eager and breathless, and indeed what is called 'Fey', for he refused to listen to the workmen and shook them off. They, familiar with the pools and shallows of the river, used force to prevent his running so great a risk, and finding he would not listen to reason, they carried him off, and locked him up in Our Lady's Chapel, not far off. Thither they returned to seek him, when work hours were over, and to their horror found he had drowned himself in the font. The 'Man' could not pass this 'Hour'.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: ff. 37a-37b.

F139. Waterhorse Tries to Drown Human in River

A – HUMAN ESCAPES

F139.A.1 *Kelpie at bridge of Luib, Corgarff*

A man had to cross the Don at the bridge of Luib, Corgarff. His wife was ill and supposed to be dying. So he made all haste, but a great fall of rain came, the river was flooded, and the bridge, which was then of wood, was carried away. When the man came to the river and found the bridge away, he was in great sorrow. It was impossible to cross. The wild, flooded river in all its force was rushing past, and he sat down and he cried. It was night and he did not observe a very tall man approaching him. He was asked by the stranger what was the cause of his distress. 'Ma wife's deein, an ma peer bairns may be mitherless afore I win hame', was the man's sad answer. The stranger tried to comfort him, and said to him, 'Oh, peer man! a'll tak you across the watter'. 'Na', said the man, in his despair, 'there's naebody born wid (would) cross the Don the nicht'. 'Oh! aye', quo the kelpie, 'I cam throw 't eh noo (even now)'. The man was doubtful. 'Are you weet', quo he, to satisfy himself of the truth. 'Aye', quo the kelpie, 'fin me (feel or touch me)'. The man examined his clothes and found that he was wet up to the oxters (armpits). He now mounted on the back of his apparently kind friend, and all went well till the two reached the middle of the river. The kelpie threw himself down into the roaring torrent, and tried to cast off his burden, crying out: 'Droon, Johnnie; droon, Johnnie; droon. For ye'll nevver win hame t' yir wife and yir bairns.' Johnnie clung hard to his false friend, and both rolled down the flood; sometimes the one uppermost, and sometimes the other. At last the current carried them to a shallow part, near the bank. The moment Johnnie felt himself touch the bottom, he let go his hold, jumped on the bank, and ran up a steep brae as fast as his feet could carry him. Kelpie, in disappointment and rage, tore a rock weighing 8 or 10 cwt. from the bottom of the river and hurled it after the escaped man up the slope to a distance of about 80 yards. It went by the name of 'the kelpie's stehn' (stone); and as each passer-by made it a point to cast a stone beside it, a cairn of considerable size arose round it, and it was called 'the kelpie's cairn'. Some years ago my informant broke up the stone for building purposes [Mr J. Farquharson, a mason, Corgarff, on the river Don]. A stone bridge now spans the river. (Corgarff).

Gregor 1889: 200.

F139.A.2 *Kelpie at bridge of Luib (variant)*

There is a Kelpy legend concerning a former bridge of Luib, which was a wooden erection. The story has it that a man had to cross it in order to get to his wife who was then very ill. When he reached the river he found that the bridge had been swept away by a flood, and as he was despairing of reaching the other bank a tall stranger suddenly appeared and offered to carry him across. The man was at first doubtful, but ultimately accepted the offer. When the couple reached the middle of the stream, the Kelpy, hitherto so plausible, endeavoured to plunge with his burden beneath the water. The passenger, however, found a foothold, and, disengaging himself from the Kelpy, scrambled up the bank, followed by a boulder hurled by the disappointed water-spirit. The boulder became known as the Kelpy's Stone, and, as passers-by added stones to it, the Kelpy's Cairn.

McConnochie 1985 [1900]: 122.

F139. Water Horse tries to drown human in river

A – HUMAN ESCAPES

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McConnochie 1985 [1900]: 122.

F139.A.3 *Jockey Cameron and the Kelpie*

Pearl fishing was an art that was practised by many of the travelling people. The River Dee and the River Don were two of the fine rivers of the North-east for pearl fishing; although the River Dee is the best of all Scotland for pearl fishing. But the Dee and the Don serve a purpose. To go pearl fishing, a person, first of all, needed a pearl-fishing jug. And how you made a pearl-fishing jug was, you took a big enamel jug and you cut it (?), ... You get pearls black, white, pink, and you get them broon. ...

We're here just noo, at a place called Park; and it's also a place where there's a lot of shell. The River takes a sharp bend 'round. One side ???, and the other side's going into a deep black? hole, on a rock edge. They're surrounded by bonny green lands.

And the story I'd like to tell is about a laddy, Jockey Cameron, that lived over a hundred years ago. And this is his story, 's been handed doon.

Jockey Cameron was a young traveller fair lad. He'd been aboot eighteen years of age; he'd been kind o' reid headed, and a fair kind o' complexion. And he made his living by harkin' roon' aboot the Dee side. And he seld things like bootlaces, and, and jugs, and pins and needles and claps, and wee odds and ends: the folks there they never used to go to the toon, and they depended on the ...come with these kind of things. Well Jockey Cameron had his ...basket in his hand, and he was walking and harking roond aboot the Park district. And it was the bonniest summer day you ever did see: the sun was just scorching hot. And the laddy had happed one or two hooses, and he got awfa' tired with the heat, it was a gey bonny day. And he says 'Och, to hell with this, he says, I'm ... I'm going to ging an' hae a dook in the river, and I think I'll do a bit o' pearl fishing.' So he took oot his wee knife that he carried ... a' travellers carried their knife with them. And all the young travellers, it was a whole group of travellers, and he cut out a bit of a young birch and he made his stick for his pearl fishing. And he took one o' his glass jugs that he had. He didnae hae enamel jug but he had a glass milk jug, and he says 'that'll do me faer looking through, caus' a glass jug will do the same thing, but it's nae so good'. And he starts pearl fishing at Park; and he'll be pearl-fishing maybe for a couple of hoors, and he was enjoying hisself pearl fishing in the water, in the shallow end. But when he had been pearl fishing a wee whilie, he looked across on the other bank of the river, he saw there was a fella' in the water. And this fella' was, he looked as though he'd been tall, very dark, curly kinda heided, but a good looking laddie. And Jockey Cameron sort a' shouts ower til him, and they hae sort of a stranger's acquaintance, ken maybe to pass the tim o' day, and this lad shouts over to Jockey Cameron: 'you're on the wrong side of the river, for the shell' he says. 'Och' he says, 'there's plenty of shell on that side' he says, 'because that's the shallow side, it's easy for folk to get in there', he says, 'but over on this side of the river, on the rock edge, it's a wee bit deeper', he says 'there's a big shell, with a crooks on their back, and the run's ? doon them'. And he says 'that's where you get the good pearls'. He says 'come over here on this side of the river'. And the fella' says, 'och' he says 'I think it'll be o'er deep for me to ging o'er there' and he says 'I'm nae a great swimmer', he says, 'I'm nae such a good swimmer at a', he says, 'that's why I bide on the shallow side of the river'. He says 'och no', he says, 'it's nae that bad', he says, 'I could nae be here, on that side, if it was o'er deep'. He says. 'Come on o'er', he says, 'I'll meet you

halfwye, cause I'm a powerful swimmer'. So Jockey Cameron starts taking two or three steps o'er, and as he gets o'er, the water gets deeper, and deeper, and the fella' says 'O aye, come on jist a bit further noo'. And he takes another couple o' steps, but as he gets o'er, the water's getting deeper, and deeper. And as he's getting closer, this fella' is getting higher, and higher. And he seems to be gang doon from the o'er side, this fella, and he says 'this fella must be standing on a rock in the water or something'. He says 'he couldnae be as tall as tha', he must be o'er seven feet that man'. And he takes another step and the water's now up to past his chest and he's balanced now, and the current and the undercurrent is getting awf'y strong noo, and the fella says 'another twa steps and you'll be here, and you'll find that the land starts to rise, you'll be coming up on the hill, it looks deep but it's nae, it's really ging to get shallower. But Jockey just has his glass in his hand, he happens just to look through his glass, and he looks doon into the clear, still water. He sees, cloven feet. He sees twa cloven feet at the bottom, and a sort of a presence of a body behind it. And he looks up, and this grea' big ta' man stands aboot eight or nine feet high. And Jockey kens richt awa, this was no mortal being, this was nae man. This, was one of the water kelpie that he'd heard so much aboot. And so, Jockey turned roond as fast as he can to move back. Ach, but this denizen starts moving along, and he starts moving after him. And Jockey is now in a struggling in the hard part of the water, and he's getting oot, and this thing comes after him. And when he looks as it's coming nearer to him, it's half man, and half horse. It's a real water kelpie, and the legends of the water kelpie says that they used to carry ye on their back, and they used to take ye doon to their deep caves under the rocky face, and underneath there at Park there's a big deep cave somewhere, under the rocky ledge of the water's edge. But Jockey got oot of the water, but this thing followed him, and Jockey ran along, and he ran. Ah, but this thing could travel and a', but mind they're oot of their element, cause really it's the water that's their element. And he runs up till he gets to the high part of the hill, and he looks for the high part, and he starts climbing up the high part, amongst the trees and up the hill, and this thing cannae bide too far awa fae the water, and has to remain within a certain area of the water. And Jockey gets oot. And then this thing stops, and he shouts to Jockey. He says 'I'll get you the next time, lad, if ever you come near my part of the river'. But Jockey Cameron was very careful, when he went pearl fishing again. And when he went, he lost his basket, he never went back for his basket, and he went along the road a good bit till he came to one of the hooses, and he was telling the man the story fit had happened to him. Now, many folk wouldnae believe a thing like that, but the folks that bide on the banks of the Dee ken many many tales of the Dee. And this man said to him, 'well laddie, if you say that happened, I could fairly believe you, because there's been an awfu' lot of folk droonned to that bitty o'er there, and have never been seen again'. So if you ever come pearl fishing at Park, aye remember, there's a story of a kelpie at Park.

SA1981.23.3 (from Stanley Robertson, Aberdeen; recorded by B. McDermitt).

Same story told by the same informant in SA1979.26.B4.

F139.A.4 *Kelpie and the Ferryman at Potarch*

More fortunate in his dealings with the kelpie was the ferryman at Potarch, in days before the bridge was there, who was much annoyed by the knavish tricks of his

fellow claimant to the water. One night, in answer to a loud hail from the other side, the ferryman crossed with his boat and shipped a passenger – 'a very grim fellow indeed, with a remarkably dark countenance, and eyes shining like a pair of live coals.' Weighty he was, too, sinking the boat almost to the gunwale, and causing the rower to labour at his oars and comminations. Then, as the passenger landed, the affrighted boatman caught sight of an extensive cloven hoof, and uttered an immediate prayer for safety. On hearing this, the water kelpie (for of this breed he was) changed into a horse, and, neighing and laughing derisively, splashed up the middle of the river and disappeared. And never after did the honest ferryman go out at night without the family Bible open in the bow of his boat, to keep off kelpies and 'a' sic like'.

Buchan (ed.) 1994: 273.

F139.A.5 *Water kelpie in the river Carron*

The reciter sayd, many a time I heard my father tell of a kelpie that he saw one time in the river Carron. He was living in the village of Bonar, and was one day going up to Couliain. When he was at the west end of the village, he saw what he took to be a woman walking up on the bank of the kyle. She was going in the same direction as himself, but at the time he took no particular heed to her. It was coming near the hour when the farm servants would be giving their horses a drink, and he said to himself that he would hurry up, to be at the ford before them, that he might get across the ford on the back of one of the horses. However he was too late, and when he reached the ford, he sat down to put off his shoes and stockings, to wade across. But just as he was doing that, he happened to look up, and he now saw that what he had taken for a woman was a water kelpie. He got an awful fright, and took to his heels. It was good for him that she did not come on him in the water. If she had, he would have been drowned.

Maclagan Mss: 7321-7322 (from Donald Forbes, Bonar Bridge).

B – HUMAN DROWNS

F139.B.1 *Kelpie in Burn of Strichen*

There is a deep pool in the Burn of Strichen, near the farm of Braco, Aberdeenshire. It was the home of a kelpie. One evening, a man, on his journey home, had to cross the stream. It was in flood, and the man was brought to a standstill. He saw a horse grazing on the bank. He conceived the idea of mounting him, and thus crossing the flooded waters. He went up to the animal, that submitted quite gently, and mounted. No sooner was he seated than off the creature ran, plunging along to the deepest part of the pool, and dragging his victim with him below the water.

Gregor 1883: 293.

F139.B.2 *Kelpie of Balrehvie*

A lad and a lass were taking a journey together. They came to a stream, which they had to cross by a ford. Seeing a white horse grazing on the bank they thought it would be easier to cross on horse-back, if they could but catch the animal, than by wading. They found no difficulty in getting hold of the horse. They mounted, and entered the ford. Everything seemed to be going well, till they reached the middle of

the ford. Then the animal started off at full gallop down the stream. He rushed along with loud haw-hawing, and kept shouting now and again:

'Sit sicker, Jenny Milne; ride fest Davie,
Till we win t' the pots o' Balrehvie.'

Kelpie is commonly spoken of as a black horse.

Gregor 1883: 293.

F139.B.3 *Kelpie of Waterstone*

Near Waterstone was a very deceptive ford, the clearness of the water leading many to miscaculate its depth. Often Kelpie would try to lure victims to their doom by imitating the cry of drowning persons in the vicinity of the ford. This at first caused the good people of Waterstone considerable annoyance, but they latterly got acquainted with the ruse, and heeded not the cries. Kelpie was, however, equal to the occasion, for when any unfortunate person who ventured into the treacherous water was actually drowning he kept shouting the words [A' the men o' Waterstone!/ Come here! Come here!], well knowing that while doing so no one would approach the ford, and that his victims would be left to their fate.

Grewar 1912: 165.

F139.B.4 *Kelpie and Farquharson-na-Bat*

[L]et me remind you that the kelpie was a fairly common frequenter of both Dee and Don. You may remember how Farquharson-na-Bat, 'Farquharson of the Wand', so called from his trade of basket-weaving, lost his footing in the river while crossing it one dark night of long ago just above the Linn of Dee beyond Braemar. Swept down the rough channel, he was drowned, and for some days search was made for his body in vain. At last his wife, taking her husband's plaid, knelt down on the river's brink and prayed to the water-spirit to give her back her dead. She then threw the plaid into the stream. Next morning her husband's corpse, with the plaid wrapped round it, was found lying on the edge of the pool. They believed, those folk of that day, that a certain ritual would make the water-spirit give up his prey.

Buchan (ed.) 1994: 272-273.

F143. Mi fhéin (Cf. AT 1137)

F143.1 *An Each Uisge*

The 'Each Uisge' at Carishader, Uig, Lewis, and the people who lived in his immediate neighbourhoud, were on such friendly terms, that on the footing on that friendship the young 'Each Uisge' ventured ('dhol air chéilidh') to pay a friendly visit to a near neighbour's house. Before he left, however, he and the good man of the house quarrelled. The man gave him a severe mauling. While he was thrashing him he nicknamed himself 'Mi-fèin 'us Mi-fèin' (Myself and Myself). The young 'Each Uisge' went back to his father roaring with pain. The old 'Each Uisge' asked him who had been at him. He replied 'Mi-fèin 'us Mi-fèin' (Myself and Myself). The old 'Each Uisge' said: 'Nam' be duine eile gu'n deanadh is misi gu'n dioladh' ('If another one had done it, I would revenge it'). This threatening reply of the old 'Each Uisge' is a common Lewis proverb, with the addition 'Mar a thubhairt an Each Uisge' ('As the water-horse said').

MacPhail 1897: 383-384.

F143.2 *An t-Each-Uisge*

The young water-horse was causing a lot of trouble for a particular family in Caraisadair when the man of the house was away in town. He got the advice of a wise old man in the town. He asked him to put on his wife's clothes and when he is asked at the door who is in (that he would answer and at the same time inviting him to come in) it's 'Myself and myself'.

CW 5 (Alexander Carmichael): f. 24.

F143.3 *An t-Each-Uisge (variant)*

The young water-horse got a rough handling in Caraisadait. The name that the man who did it gave himself was 'Myself and myself'. The old water-horse asked him who did this to him. He said 'myself and myself'.

'If someone else had done it, it's I who would be avenging it.'

Hence the proverb.

CW 5, f. 24A (see CW 108, f. 41). From Ian MacLeod, Bhaltos, Mhaidh 6, 1874.

F143.4 *The Water Horse*

The Gaelic version of this story seems to me to be much nearer the original than the English version. The outlines of the Gaelic story thus runs. The young '*Each-Uisge*' was annoying a family in Carishadair in the absence of 'Fear-an-tighe'. By the advice of the local *oracle*, '*fear-an-tighe*' was to don his wife's clothes and to watch for the arrival of the young water-horse. And when the young water-horse made his appearance and inquired in the door who was in, he was to reply, '*Mi-féin-us-mi-féin*' i.e. Myself-and-myself, and at the same time to invite him to come forward to the fire, and to watch his opportunity to scald him. He in any particular literally followed out the instructions received. The young water horse ran away from the house screaming with pain. His father the old water horse asked him what had befallen him and who did it. He replied myself and myself had scalded him. His father the old water horse replied: 'If another man had done it, it's I that would avenge it'.

Hence the proverb.

CW 5, f. 56 (first page from the end of the notebook).

F143.5 *An t-Each Uisge*

The young water-horse was causing much trouble for a family ... in Carasiatar when the man of the house would be in town. He got the advice of a wise old man and he advised him to put on women's clothes and when the young water-horse would come to the door and ask who's in, that he should answer while inviting him to come forward, 'myself and myself'.

The young water-horse got a rough handling that night and he went away ... till he reached home. Who did this to you said the old water-horse – 'myself and myself' said the young water-horse. 'Were it someone else who had done it it's I would avenge it', said the old water-horse.

CW 108, f. 41 (A. Carmichael – from Iain MacLeod, Bhaltos, 6.5.1874). Cf. CW 5, f. 24A.

F143.6 *Mi fhein mi fhein*

A water-horse came to Sacach to a woman at the shealing who was waiting for her sons and husband who were out fishing. The water-horse seems to have been of the centaur tribe as he is represented as being ill-clad with a remarkably short kilt.

Cia ainm a th'ort? said he – What is your name?

Mi fhein mi fhein, said she – Myself myself.

He wanted food and she put a big pot on the fire and made thin porridge, and watching him opportunately scalded him.

... He rushed away to his mother shouting '*Tha mi chrioslach air a losgadh!*' '*Co rinn ort e*', [Who did this?] said his mother, the only woman the monster had hitherto known, who lived in the Clefts by Hastavagh.

'*Mi fhein mi fhein*', said he.

... 'If someone else had done it, it's I would be avenging it'.

CW 58, f. 160 (Father Allan MacDonald, Eriskay).

F143.7 *Grey hair kelpie*

Another story about the Kelpies is as follows: – One night a shepherd's wife was making her husband's supper while he was fishing on a small lake near the house. While she was busy at this a very handsome young man came into the house and sat down on a chair. He then commenced speaking to her and asked what was her name. She answered '*Mi fein 's mi fein*'. The woman noticed through a loose jacket and shirt he had on that his breast was covered with long grey hair and by this she knew him to be a kelpie. She was making porridge when he came in and when she was going to dish it she suddenly clapped the pot on his head. He ran out yelling and by his yells attracted his father who came out of the lake and asked who hurt him. He said '*Mi fein 's mi fein*'. Then the father said 'If any other Kelpie or any human being hurt you I would have my revenge but since you hurt yourself you may bear the pain.'

CW 88, ff. 29-30 (Hugh Tolmie).

F143.8 *An t-each uisge*

Variation on the theme of the woman saying her name is 'Myself and myself' and

scalding the young water horse with a pot of hot porridge.

CW 111, f. 17 (A. Carmichael). (Not in map)

F143.9 *Skye version*

One night a shepherd's wife was making her husband's supper, while he was out fishing on the loch near the house. When she was busy at this a very handsome young man came into the house and sat down on a chair. In the course of the conversation, he asked her what her name was. She replied, *'Mi fhein 's mi fhein'* – myself and myself. The woman had noticed through a loose jacket he had on that his breast was covered with long grey hair, and by this she knew him to be a kelpie. It was porridge she was making, and when she was going to dish it she suddenly clapped the pot on the stranger's head. He rushed out yelling, and by his yells brought out his father out of the lake. His father asked him who hurt him. '*Mi fhein 's mi fhein*', he replied. Then the father made answer – 'If any other kelpie or human being had hurt you, I would have avenged you, but since you hurt yourself you may bear the pain'.

'Tales of the Water Kelpie', 1886-1887: 515.

F143.10 *The old woman and the waterhorse*

[Summary] An old woman in bothy was making porridge. The water horse in the form of a man appeared and she asked where he came from. He said that he was going from the loch below to the loch above and that his name was Luid a Lochain. She said her name was 'mi fhin mi fhin'. She offered him some porridge and threw it at him when he accepted. He fled back into the loch.

SA1958.167.B6 (from John Finlayson, Lochalsh; recorded by C. MacLean)

The same story is told by the same informant in SA1958.169.A2.

F143.11 *Myself and myself in Berneray*

[Summary] Water horse story with play on the words 'mi fhin 's mi fhin'.

SA1971.277.B12 (from Mrs Mary Ann MacLeod, Berneray, Harris; recorded by I. Paterson).

F143.12 *Water horse in Raasay*

Water horse in human form comes into house where woman is cooking porridge. She throws the hot porridge between his thighs. Waterhorse goes out shouting.

IFC Mss 1026: 375-376 (from Peggy Maclean; coll. C. I. Maclean).

F150. Dogs Drive away Supernatural [cf. W3]

A – NEVER RETURN

F150.A.1 *The Last Each Uisge*

The last each uisge or water horse seen in this country was at a cave called ... near Lewis ... Three men were in said cave roasting a deer they had killed during the day. When the supper was nearly done, a very handsome ... woman entered the mouth of the cave. [Summary] The men asked where she had come from, and she said that she came little ago ashore at Dellnock or Skerndhal' which is four miles west of the Butt of Lewis. The men got suspicious because it would have taken more than a day for a young woman to get there. She took hold of all their roasted venison, turned into a water horse, and attempted to be at one of the men. They called their dogs, who attacked the water horse and dragged him outside the cave. The men stayed in a corner of the cave, all night expecting the monster would appear in the entrance of the cave to eat them up. At dawn the noise outside ceased. The men waited with anguish until the sun got up. To their great elation the monster was dead with one of the dogs dead under his tail after going through him, the other in his mouth with the tail in sight and the head down his throat.

Note: The narrator of the above is John Smith, now residing at Breaclate in the island of Berneray, parish of Uig, upwards of 80 years of age.

Campbell Mss 50.1.13: f.75a 36-75b (story 6th)

B - OTHER

F150.B.1 *Neil and the water horse*

The water-horse came to the shealing of Neil of the mountains in the shape of a woman. Neil's dogs recognised that it was not a woman. When they saw her they snarled. Leash your dogs, she said. I won't just now, said Neil. He threw a quarter of meat to them. She ate up the very same piece. Throw me more, she said. I won't, said Neil! Tie up your dogs she said again! I won't said Neil! He let loose the dogs but they didn't do a thing to her. He then let loose the bitch! The bitch killed her. After her death she turned into a big fair mare.

He tied up ... all through the night in order to keep out the water-horse.

CW 5, f. 26 (cf. CW 108, f. 43)

F150.B.2 *Airidh Neill*

Same as CW 5, f. 26 above, concerning the shealing of Neil of the mountains and his dogs.

CW 108, f. 43 (A. Carmichael – cf. CW 5, f. 26)

Miscellaneous

Misc.1 [Cf. AT 451]: '*The Maiden Who Seeks her Brothers*'

There was a time yonder in which a water horse came and stole a lad away with it, and the lad turned into a deer. It was not known what had happened to the lad, and they were looking for him all the summer, but they got no word of him. But at the latter end, at the time of harvest, a sister to the lad was out cutting heather a day, and a number of deer came down where she was, and one of them came near her. When the girl lifted her head, all the rest ran away, but this one stood where he was, and he said to her, 'I am your brother, and if you will make a shirt for me of the mountain-down of the hill-sides, I will come back, and I will be a brother to you as I was before; but you will take care that you must not speak one word all the time you will be making it.'

She had a creel with her for the heather, and she emptied out what she had of heather in it, and she began to gather the mountain-down. She took the years making the shirt, and all the time she did not speak a syllable.

She was now after marrying, and she had a baby son, and when the child was born, the mid-wife put it beside her in the bed, to try if that would make her speak, but it did not. Then the mid-wife killed the child, but still there came not a syllable out of the woman's mouth.

When the husband of the one that was in the bed came home, the mid-wife said to him that the child had been killed by its mother, but that not a syllable of talk had been gotten from her. He was displeased, but he did nothing to her that time. But in course of time, she bore another son, and about this time, she had the shirt finished, and she had it under her pillow. The wid-wife put this child beside her, as she had done with the first one, but there came not a word from the one that was in the bed, a thing when the mid-wife saw, she killed the child; but yet the other one did not speak.

When her husband came home, the mid-wife said to him that his wife had killed the child, and that she was still as obstinately refusing to speak as she had ever been. This enraged the man, and he ordered them to raise a big fire, and to put his wife on the fire. They did that, and they sent out word to every man about, them to come to see the burning. The hundreds gathered, and the one that was to be burned was brought out. But she had the shirt now finished, and she brought it with her.

Just when they were going to throw her on the fire, they saw a great man riding on a grey horse, and two boys with him. He was a handsome man, and when he came forward, she threw the shirt on him. This was her brother, and he spoke to the husband of the woman that was about to be burned, and he said to him: 'Here to you your two sons. It was not my sister that killed them, but the mid-wife'. When the man heard that, he ordered them to put the mid-wife on the fire in the place of his own wife, and they did that, and they boiled her there. The man and his wife went home, and they were happy together. Their two lads grew up to be good lads, and the brother of the woman did not go away any more, and he was a brother to her as long as she was alive.

MacLagan Mss: 8128-8130 (not on map).

Misc.2 *Water horse takes revenge*

A Lewis man says he has heard many stories about water horses in his native island. He recited the following:

One day a boy belonging to the township of Borre was herding his father's cattle, near a small fresh water loch. The boy fell asleep, and when he awoke he found a young each uisge lying beside him, and its head on his lap. The boy did not know what to do, for he was afraid to stir. He was so little, it was only a frock he had on. He just lay quiet as he was, but began to smooth the water horse with his hand, and to plait its hair, and this seemed to please it, and in a little while it fell asleep. The boy now cut the piece of his frock away on which the each uisge had its head, and slipping away as quietly as he could, made for home as fast as his feet could carry him. But he had not gone far till the horse awoke, and the boy being still within sight, it gave chase, and caught him just as he was going in at the door. When the boy found himself caught, he gave a tremendous scream and fainted. The boy's father, who happened to be fishing at the time, was not far from the shore, and when he heard the scream, it was his own son, and he rushed home, and taking his gun with him, away he went after the water horse, and overtook it when it was almost at the loch, and there he shot it dead, and brought his son safely home.

That was some time in Summer, and when the following winter came about, a woman that was quite a stranger in the place came the way, and was going about from house to house, offering assistance to any that would give her anything to do at wool working. There was nobody there abouts that could say who she was or where she belonged to, for no one in the place had ever seen her before. When she got employment in a family, she went and lived in that house as long as the employment lasted. Among the houses into which she got in this way was the house of this boy's parents, and she was no time there when it began to be noticed that she was much interested in the boy, but nobody suspected any mischief. She would be telling stories to the boy, and one day the boy told her of his adventure with the water horse, and about how his father had shot it. Well, a day or two after that both the woman and the boy were amissing, and when search was made they could not be found anywhere. But it was found out that the woman was the mother of the young water horse that had been shot; and that she had changed herself into the form of a woman to get her revenge. The boy was never seen after that.

The reciter said that in Lewis there is a distinction, which however is not closely insisted upon between the eich uisge and the eich mhara. The former are supposed to inhabit fresh water lochs, whereas the latter live in the sea, and are somewhat larger than the other. In both cases there are the two sexes, and they are supposed to have the power of transforming themselves into human form.

MacLagan Mss: 9129-9130.

Misc.3 *The Grey wrinkled old man*

Kelpie sometimes takes the form of a grey wrinkled old man.

A man was crossing the Burn of Strichen, at the same place, the farm of Braco [Aberdeenshire]. On approaching a dyke he had to pass over, he heard, as he thought, some one speaking. He walked quietly towards the spot from which the sound of words came, and peeped over the dyke. He saw an old man mending his trowsers, and, as he was mending, he kept saying, 'That clout 'ill dee here; and this ane 'ill dee there.' The man looked, and listened for a little. At last he inflicted a blow on the old

man's head, saying, 'An this clout 'ill dee there'. In a moment the kelpie was in his true form, and off with a loud neighing to his deep pool.

Gregor 1883: 293-294.

Misc.4 *Water horse in Loch Dhool*

They will be telling me that there used to be a water horse in Loch Dhool, and some say it is there yet, and that some will be seeing him. There is a story I have often heard about a man that had a farm beside the loch at one time, long ago. It was the harvest time, and the farmer had a great many stooks of corn on the field, and one day a man came the way and he had a rope made of birch twigs (*gad*). He asked the farmer if he would allow him to take a *cual* (burden) of the corn sheaves. The farmer, thinking that would not be much, said he might take it. So the man stretched his rope on the ground, and began to gather the stooks, and to build them up on the rope. He was putting up, and putting up, and like as he would never stop. At least the farmer got alarmed in case he was to lose all, and he cried: '*Di-h-aoine threabh mi. Di-h-aoine chuir mi. Di-h-aoine bhuain mi. An t-aon a rinn na seachd saoghail, na leig gu'm faigheadh iad mo chuid uile ann an aon chuail*' – 'Friday I ploughed. Friday I sowed. Friday I reaped. The one that made the seven worlds, do not let that they might get all my gear in one burden'. With that the gad broke, and away went the man into the loch, where he disappeared. People were making out that it was the water horse in the shape of a man.

MacLagan Mss: 9054.

Misc. 5 *Each-uisge in Grulin*

Lovely girl in Grulin goes daily to meet man. People notice that she is not as well as usual. Women follow her one day. She sits on a hill. Women sit around her and light a fire. A youth comes and shakes hand with all the women. One of the women takes red-hot ploughshare. Youth grips it and disappears in flames of fire. Girl is never interfered with again.

IFC Mss 1028: 177-178 (from Lachlan Campbell, Eigg; collected by C. I. Maclean).

Misc. 6 *The Water horse*

All over the North, stories are told about the water horse kelpie, or 'each uisge'. This dreaded beast is reputed to be able to lure the unsuspecting to their doom, either by fascination or by its wonderful electro-magnetic powers.

The beast can assume many forms, and often takes on that of a man or woman, as it can generally effect its purpose in one or other of these forms. One kelpie, in the form of a handsome young man, once made love to the daughter of a farmer who lived near its lake. The girl submitted willingly enough to his advances, until one day, when she accidentally spilled some boiling water on his feet, he terrified her by whinnying like a horse, instead of crying out like a human being.

That night she told her brothers of the incident, and they at once suspected the truth. They lay in wait for the young man as he came to visit the girl, and they speedily put him to death with their dirks. He screamed all the while like a horse, and kicked so furiously that he broke one of his assailant's legs, but when he was dead it was a horse and not a man that lay on the ground. They carried the injured man

home, but when next morning they went with a cart to fetch the body of the water horse, only slime was to be seen.

Roberston 1964: 91-92 (not in map).

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Notebook.

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